

Marxism Socialism Indian Politics

A VIEW FROM THE LEFT

Randhir Singh

MARXISM, SOCIALISM, INDIAN POLITICS

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Communist Manifesto

Socialism is young....

The road is long and in part unknown....

To build communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.

Che Guevara

It is only when people get to the point of seeing that the price of contradictions is yet more intolerable than the price of ending them that they acquire the nerve to go all the way through to a consistent socialist politics....

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Communist Manifesto

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The road is long and in part unknown....

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Che Guevara

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That this epistemological skepticism stops short of nihilism in practice only means that, at this level at least, it is impossible to wish away social reality and some knowledge to cope with it, however fragmented a view one takes of both; the fragments are yet the sites where human beings live and act. Postmodernism thus is not entirely bereft of knowledge. Its 'fragmented knowledge' has produced some keen insights, well-suited for narrowly defined specific types of tasks, even when any 'big picture' or 'meta-narrative' is ruled out. This is welcome and to be acknowledged. But there is an interesting aspect to it which also cries out to be noticed. Its 'rhetoric of ruptures' notwithstanding, post-modernism here is very much like the modernist (mainstream or bourgeois) social science, governed as it has been by quantitative empiricism and mindless specialisation, where its narrow focus and piecemeal approach, and distrust of generalised explanatory theory, have led it to study only relatively unrelated, particular parts, areas or problems of contemporary social and political life, and thus helped it avoid 'big issues' concerning the basic character of society as a whole and the general direction of its movement, and thereby also evade the issue of large scale social change. Neither modernist social scientists, nor post-modernists, however, would be willing to accept that in turning away from 'grand theory' in one case and 'meta-narrative' in the other, they have both come to deal with 'small potatoes' only and avoid the 'big issues'. The former assume away the big issues, whereas the post-modernists claim that big issues do not exist or that they are impossible to understand. If modernist social science *adjusts* itself to existing social reality, that is, the established social order, in one way, post-modernism does it in another, its own post-modernist way.

The adjustment has been facilitated in both cases by their respective stances on the question of values. Bourgeois social science's treatment of values as somehow beyond rational inquiry or validation (and the accompanying fetishisation of 'value freedom' or 'ethical neutrality') is paralleled by post-modernism's ultra-relativism in matters moral or cultural. It should not be difficult to see that in both cases, notwithstanding

their occasional expression of dissatisfaction, or disillusionment, with the current state of affairs, this in effect amounts to an endorsement of and submission to the currently dominant moral and cultural values of bourgeois society. The two incidentally, also share in obscuring this adjustment and submission to bourgeois social order by their linguistic practices. Critical of unnecessary obscurity and jargon of modernist discourse, post-modernism has created a parallel obscurity of hermeneutics, deconstruction and textual nihilism. Once again, triviality of content is often in sharp contrast to complexity of form, obscurity of presentation a substitute or compensation for the lack of substance. 'Post-modern gibberish' of 'the latest lunacies of Paris culture', Chomsky has called it. A critic has written of 'the more obscure, relativistic cant put out by post-modernism', and as an example referred us to Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and New International!*



Post-modernism's fascination for obscurity in thought and expression is well-illustrated by the now famous 'Sokal affair', the unorthodox and admittedly uncontrolled experiment carried out by Alan Sokal, Professor of Physics at New York University, to show up the kind of work that has proliferated under the banner and influence of post-modernism. Alan Sokal self-identifies as 'a stodgy old scientist who believes, naively, that there exists an external world, that there exist objective truths about that world, and that my job is to discover some of them', adding: 'If science were merely a negotiation of social conventions about what is agreed to be "true", why would I bother devoting a large fraction of my all-too-short life to it?' And the experiment was a parody he wrote under the forbiddingly pompous title, 'Transgressing the boundaries: Towards a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity', which was then accepted and published by the prestigious American cultural studies journal, organ of American post-modernists, *Social Text* (1996). As later explained by Sokal himself, the parody was constructed around quotations from eminent French and American intellectuals—a veritable

pantheon of contemporary 'French theory' including Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Felix Guattari, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, Bruno Latour, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michael Serres and Paul Virilio, and many leading American academics in Cultural Studies and related fields—about the alleged philosophic and social implications of mathematics and the natural sciences. The passages may have been absurd or meaningless, but they were nonetheless authentic. Sokal's only contribution was to provide a 'glue' (the 'logic' of which was admittedly whimsical) to join these quotations together and praise them. The article, its supposedly erudite but nonsensical jargon apart, was brimming with absurdities and blatant non sequiturs. The whole thing, as Sokal later said, was a 'melange of truths, half-truths, quarter-truths, falsehoods, non-sequiturs and syntactically correct sentences that have no meaning, whatsoever'. In addition, it asserted an extreme form of cognitive relativism: after mocking the old-fashioned 'dogma' that 'there exists an external world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed of humanity as a whole', it proclaimed categorically that 'physical "reality", no less than social "reality", is at bottom a social and linguistic construct'. By a series of stunning leaps of logic, it arrived at the conclusion that 'the pi of Euclid and the G of Newton, formerly thought to be constant and universal, are now perceived in their ineluctable historicity'. The rest too was in the same vein.

Published in a special issue of *Social Text* devoted to rebutting the criticisms levelled against post-modernism and social constructivism by several distinguished scientists, neither the editors of the journal nor any of the post-modern fraternity recognised that it was a parody and a hoax till, a few months later, Sokal himself revealed the truth, provoking a firestorm of reaction in both the popular and academic press, earning Sokal, along with protests, the thanks from many scholars and researchers in the humanities and social sciences for what he had done. Incidentally, the 'affair' provoked this delicious observation from a commentator, Katha Pollitt:

the comedy of the Sokal incident is that it suggests that even the post-modernists don't really understand one another's writing and

make their way through the text by moving from one familiar name or notion to the next like a frog jumping across a murky pond by way of lily pads.



Possibly the most important thing to be specifically noted in postmodernist social theory is its cognitive relativism, which throws into question any effort at scientific understanding of social reality, dismissing it as vulgar positivism, and has obviously nihilistic consequences in the sphere of morality or ethics. There is not just an emphasis on discourses (or language) as opposed to the facts to which these discourses refer, but a rejection of the very idea that facts exist or that one may refer to them. All facts are contingent and socially, indeed intellectually, constructed, and all discourses are merely 'stories' or 'narratives', none more objective or truthful than another. All are 'equally valid' as descriptions or analyses of the real world (assuming that one admits the existence of a real world). Writing of 'the rise of "postmodernist" intellectual fashions in Western universities, particularly in departments of literature and anthropology, which imply that all "facts" claiming objective existence are simply intellectual constructions... that there is no clear difference between fact and fiction', Eric Hobsbawm has insisted that there is a difference 'and for historians, even for the most militantly anti-positivist ones among us, the ability to distinguish between the two is absolutely fundamental'. Postmodernism does not recognise such 'fundamentalism' or 'dogmas'. It so emphasises the historicity of knowledge as to confuse the questions of origins with those of truth or validity and is wary of and rejects any assessment of social reality that claims to be based on truth, going beyond what is currently accepted as 'good in the way of belief'—which, it should be obvious, is established by media, business interests, governments, by the powers that be in our society. In denying any real foundation for knowledge or truth, the post-modern scepticism permits at best only interpretation, 'fiction', as some would call it. It may with Foucault claim that in holding this view one need not 'go so far as to say that fictions are beyond truth'; but such concession is only verbal and ritualistic, a

homage that the good old 'concept of truth' yet exacts from the post-modern sceptic. What in effect ensues is a pragmatism which, as with Richard Rorty for example, contends that the only kind of truth that counts is the power to enter into meaningful conversation with the members of one's own interest group, or 'interpretive community' who share the same 'good in the way of belief'. We have already noticed how its recognition of the undoubted historicity of values, combined with a refusal to admit any other validating principles, leads post-modernism to sport an ultra-relativism which denies the very possibility of any universal values like equality, fraternity, justice, etc. What needs to be further recognised is that its cognitive relativism, where 'nothing explains anything and everything is simply a matter of perspective' and the 'concept of truth' is irrelevant, has the consequence of making it even more nihilistic in the matter of values or moral judgments than would be the case otherwise. We are indeed left with no values at all, not even the otherwise permitted, historically conditioned particular values, though we were still without any rational criteria to evaluate them, to choose or decide between them. As Norman Geras has argued:

If there is no truth, there is no injustice. Stated less simplistically, if truth is wholly relativised or internalised to particular discourses or language games or social practices, there is no injustice. The victims and protesters of any *putative* injustice are deprived of their last and often best weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story, which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes.

Of course, one cannot insist that there is just one true image of a person or description of an event or state of affairs. Different angles of vision and personal beliefs, different political, cultural or other purposes, different linguistic and conceptual frameworks, will shape and colour the content of any description or narrative, yielding a plurality of possible representations of whatever is the subject at hand. Yet there is, for all that, a way things were down there, a reality constraining the range of adequate description, interpretation or explanation, the basis for a more or less true, relatively but nevertheless

objectively true, description, interpretation or explanation. Post-modernism's cognitive relativism, pushed this way or thus far, simply blocks this last kind of judgment and thus opens the door wide for a moral relativism which is ultimately destructive of all values—though many of the post-modernists are in the habit of denying that they are relativists at all.



Post-modernism claims to be a radical social theory, it not *the* radical social theory for our postmodernist times. Many who would still be on the left have even seen it as a replacing advance over Marxism. But its basic thrust and detailed principles or positions are destructive of any kind of radical politics. We have already noticed its emphasis on the fragmented nature of the world and human knowledge, and the impossibility of any emancipatory politics based on some kind of 'totalising' vision. The view that there are no systems and no history susceptible to causal analysis rules out any possibility of getting to the root of many powers that oppress us, and with it any aspiration to some kind of serious united opposition for general *human* emancipation. The fragments alone can be the sites of our struggles, and the most we can hope for is a lot of particular and separate resistances, an oppositional politics fragmented and parcellised into many disconnected pieces. Radical politics has been traditionally seen as having to do with the overarching power of classes or states and opposition to them. This is now effectively pushed out of consideration, giving way to the fractured struggles of 'identity politics', 'new social movements', or even the 'personal as political', to a reformist politics devoid of any overarching political or social vision. Instead of a radical departure, we once again witness the much proclaimed post-modernist 'rupture' ending up as a continuity. For this is surely not very different from those traditional forms of liberal 'pluralism' which denied that there was any concentration of power or systemic source of domination in capitalist society, and argued in defence of a 'pluralist politics'. It would appear that the new post-modernist discourse is 'post-modernist', rather 'anti-modernist', only in its rejection of modernism in one of its forms—Marxism, while adopting the old universalist

language of another—liberalism, the ruling form of the modernist project.

A significant aspect of post-modernist social theory, which more than anything else exposes its real nature and pretensions to radicalism, is the way it treats the question of capitalism. Rooted essentially, even if ambiguously, in 'the golden age' of post-war capitalism, the 1960s, post-modernists have accepted an ahistorical notion of a capitalism that delivers, and failed or refused to see it historically and as it actually exists and works—an essentially irrational economic system, full of inherent contradictions and problems and, despite current triumphalism, in deep crisis everywhere. In the words of Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'the postmodern sense of epochal novelty depends on ignoring, or denying, one overwhelming historical reality: that all the ruptures of the twentieth century have been bound together in a single historical unity by the logic—and the internal contradictions—of capitalism, the system that dies a thousand deaths.' The in-fashion post-modernist philosophers have been busy deconstructing literally everything in sight, except what really counts, that is, capitalism.

Post-modernism's self-description and the form of periodisation it relies on—modernity transiting, 'rapturously', to post-modernity—obscures the most important part of the way the things really were, and are, out there, that is, the historical development and actuality of capitalism. And the way its epistemological scepticism has gone on to question and throw out all notions of 'structure' or 'system', or 'totality', capitalism is simply 'off limits' for purposes of study and analysis as a structured whole or a system—least of all as an irrational, exploitative system whose accumulative logic puts its disfiguring mark on everything within its reach, which reach, via market, extends far beyond our economy, politics, morality, culture, etc., into the deepest recesses of our social and personal life—'though we may forget about totality', Eagleton has written, 'we may be sure that it will not forget about us.' That 'totality' remains forgotten and capitalism as a totalising system can hardly be said to exist in postmodern discourse, has an obvious implication. If you cannot even *think* capitalism as a system, you

cannot understand or criticise it, let alone oppose it. You may as well lie back and enjoy its consumerist and other pleasures—which is indeed what most post-modernists are doing.

The denial or rejection of anti-capitalist politics as old-fashioned, out-of-date left politics, or a dangerous 'totalising' or 'universalist' enterprise, has its inevitable fallout. When the irrationality of the structural logic of capitalism comes to threaten people with its multiform consequences and problems, which are neither understood nor opposed, and which mess up and disorient even the alternative politics of 'identity' and 'new social movements', which, in any case, as with the conventional old politics, does not take you very far in this situation, a 'capitalism is off limits' approach can only lead to cynicism and depoliticisation, if not outright reaction.

There are those who have hoped for post-modernism having the same politicising effect on young people today that existentialism had on youth in the West in the 1960s and early 1970s. But so far the evidence has been only to the contrary. Deep epistemological scepticism and profound political defeatism have gone hand in hand in post-modernism, pointing the way to disillusion, apathy and inactivity. The capitalist social order today tends to produce and reproduce political apathy. Culture of depoliticisation is a hallmark of monopoly capitalism which infects even the most oppressed sections of society. Post-modernism feeds into monopoly capitalism's culture of depoliticisation. The claims to be a radical social theory, however, persist. But, as Michael Ryan, in a book written sometime back to find common ground between Marxism and post-modernism, noted: 'millions have been killed because they were Marxists; no one will be obliged to die because she/he is a deconstructionist.'

Post-modernism does have a certain sophistication to its critique of 'modernism so-called' including Marxism, though critics have also seen it as a 'hairsplitting philosophy', as Marx in his time described the early 'dissection' of Hegelian philosophy. It has revelled in proclaiming Marxism to be dead and buried, but scholars, in a way similar to Marx and Engels' characterisation of new German philosophers in the opening

paragraphs of *The German Ideology*, have found it generating much noise but little understanding. While it certainly knows that all is not well with the world, post-modernism indeed offers little to help make it a significantly better place, only some petty, fragmented interventions and a sophisticated way of making peace with its many wrongs. This is so primarily because post-modernist theory precludes even the notion of capitalism as a system—and this at a time when the world is being shaped, rather mis-shaped, by global capitalism as never before, both at the centre and in its semi-peripheries and peripheries. It is indeed amazing that for all its rhetoric against 'meta-narratives', post-modernism fails or refuses to see the ongoing 'meta-narrative' of our times, that of capitalism, and does so when continuing beyond its historical time, capitalism has exhausted its creative potentialities and is now a bearer of only destructive possibilities for the future of humankind.



Post-modernism rejects 'meta-narratives' of human emancipation, and views 'fragments', all that is there to social reality according to it, as the only possible spaces for any kind of 'emancipatory' politics. In doing so post-modernism does tap some real concerns or causes of our time—democracy and decentralisation of power, economic and social justice, environmentalism, feminism and sexual liberation, human rights, rights of ethnic groups and minorities, and so on—but without providing any effective answers to the problems involved. The task here is to understand the historical material conditions that block the realisation of the objectives which these concerns or causes represent and the kind of transformations that would make their realisation possible. But any serious effort of this nature is bound to take us back to capitalism and its systemic logic. And here post-modernism, far from being a help, is in fact a positive liability; its fragmentation of both theory and practice and refusal to see the systemic nature of capitalism only weakens our capacity to understand and to resist capitalism, which is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for a successful pursuit of the above-mentioned concerns or causes.

It needs to be noticed that there is nothing particularly 'post-modernist' about these concerns or causes which post-modernism claims as its own. If anything, they are quintessentially 'modernist'. Most of them are deeply rooted in Enlightenment values—a humanist pride in our existence, faith in reason, science and knowledge, hopefulness about a future of progress and a world fit for every human being, etc.—and all of them long part of the general history of the socialist Left, and still central to its struggle for a more humane society which it believes socialism to be. A failure to see this is yet another evidence of post-modernism's remarkable insensitivity to history which also accounts for this supposedly radical theory's deafness to the reactionary echoes of its attack on the Enlightenment and its values.

It has been suggested that while both sides of the twentieth century's ambiguous history, its horrors and its wonders, have played a part in forming the post-modernist consciousness, the horrors that have undermined the old idea of progress are less important in defining the distinctive nature of today's post-modernism than are the wonders of modern technology and the riches of consumer capitalism, so that 'post-modernism sometimes looks like the ambiguities of capitalism as seen from the vantage point of those who enjoy its benefits more than they suffer its costs'. It is surely pertinent to note that, questions concerning capitalism and post-modernism apart, of the more worthwhile benefits that people in the privileged positions have enjoyed in the West and elsewhere, not a few have accrued from a pursuit of the Enlightenment values, which pursuit is supposed to have continued as a questionable feature of modernity. In other words, those denouncing Enlightenment and modernity have been beneficiaries of the very values they so blithely denounce today. These privileged post-modernist elites may well disown, condemn and reject these values now, but the overwhelming mass of common humanity the world over, suffering from injustice and exploitation, poverty, disease and ignorance, all sorts of economic and social backwardness, can ill afford to do so. They have indeed refused to abandon these values. As O'Neill has rather cryptically remarked: 'No,

it is not these people who have abandoned idealism, universalism, truth and justice. It is those, who already enjoy these things who have denounced them on behalf of the others.'

The people need to defend and uphold Enlightenment values in full recognition of the fact that even though it had nothing to do with many of them, capitalism, in its contradictory progress has both sustained and destroyed these values and that in its current phase it subverts and destroys them more than ever before. If 'modernity' has indeed anything at all to do with these values, then modernity is well and truly about over, terminated by capitalism. Enlightenment too could be declared dead, almost. May be socialism will revive it. Be that as it may, the vital fact is that the reality generating the world's most serious problems, today and for our future, has a name and it is not modernity but capitalism. And post-modernity is no answer to it. The antithesis to capitalism is not post-modernism, it is socialism.



The material, moral and cultural crisis of our times, further underlined and accelerated by the Soviet collapse, has found its response in various forms of backward-looking philosophies, newer versions of old Right-wing ideologies, religious and other fundamentalisms. These have flourished the world over, even when they have no answers to the real problems of the common people. The backward parts of the world have been having more than their share of reactionary theories and practices. The economically and technologically advanced Western world, while having its share of these, has pre-eminently responded with a supposedly forward looking social theory of its own, post-modernism, which, however, is not without its almost inevitable weak or loud, despairing or hopeful, echoes among the academics and intelligentsia of the backward parts. This theory too has little understanding of and no answers to the problems the common people face, and is an ally of reaction in its own way. But it has a feature which perhaps, for good or ill, could be regarded as distinctively its own: political impotence. Professing an epistemic skepticism, explanatory agnosticism and historical cynicism, it has generated new orthodoxies of

relativism and revived or reinforced many old ones, to provide a way of seeing, knowing and acting in the world where we are informed that to speak of 'reality' is ancient folly, that 'the way the world is no particular way at all, if indeed we can know enough about it in the first place even to assert that', that there is no 'objective truth' any longer, nor any values or ideals that can be rationally defended or validated, that all social analysis is blinded and indeterminate and, therefore, all action beyond a timorous reformism a dangerous adventure, that there are no structures to break or causes to espouse, the 'system' or 'economic structures' that radicals seek to change are, theoretically speaking, simply non-existing, that all this, and whatever else there is, is real only as 'object' for discourse and 'discourse' is all that is left to us to engage in, indeed the only worthwhile activity for those who are really knowledgeable about things or feel concerned about them. No wonder it has been suggested that Chinese rulers could well have distributed copies of Derrida, Foucault or Laclau to the protesting students and workers at Tiananmen Square. This would have surely dispersed them more easily and rapidly than water cannons or bullets. They would have read and realised the futility of it all, repented their waywardness and returned home peacefully, to the safety and pleasures of post-modernist discourse!

Post-modernism is hardly the philosophy or social theory to help us confront the hard and harsh realities of the contemporary capitalist world. It simply does not have the resources for that. It came up very much as a fashion, and fashions change. It is very likely that a decade or two from now, it will no longer be the major point of reference it is today, especially among certain elite intellectual or academic circles. Its political impotence or defeatism apart, it is too feeble philosophically to have anything like the intellectual staying power of Marxism it claims to replace and to which people will soon turn, or return, if for no other reason than the one adduced by Althusser:

the feebleness of current theoretical thinking is such that the mere reappearance of those elementary but necessary ingredients of authentic thought—rigour, coherence, and clarity—will at a certain

point contrast so markedly with prevailing intellectual attitudes that all those who are bewildered by what has happened are bound to be struck by them.

Marxism, however, has a great deal more to offer than just 'rigour, coherence, and clarity', only a body of 'authentic thought'. It has its acknowledged achievements of theory and practice, its scientific potential, ethical commitment, and failures notwithstanding, a long tradition of successful revolutionary politics and, above all, an overriding contemporary relevance, where capitalism is in a long-term structural crisis which, precisely because of its current 'triumph', makes capitalism more desperate and dangerous than ever before, indeed a threat to the very future of humankind. Marxism has weightier reasons for people, including radical intellectuals, turning, or returning, to Marxism.

XXV

It is now universally recognised that the world is in deep trouble. And there is no assurance that it can eventually transcend its current crises. Marxists are, thankfully, far from being the only ones striving nowadays to tell the truth about the world and act on the truth which is theirs. But if the challenge is seen as anything more than finding more or less effective answers to its isolated problems, if it is to articulate a programme of action, both inspirational and practical, whose analysis of the world is holistic enough to go to the roots of its troubles in order to identify the barriers, material-ecological as well as social-structural, that need to be overcome to find truly effective and lasting answers, then it seems inconceivable that this can be done without turning to Marxism—at the very least, without assigning a major role for the Marxist tradition. Of course, this Marxism can neither be the ancient 'official' Marxism or the recently fashionable 'post-Marxism'. It will be authentic Marxism that, conscious of its limitations, is open, in the spirit of its classical tradition, to other critical and non-complacent currents of thought and action, and, conscious of its inadequacies, in the spirit of the same classical tradition, is orthodoxly firm in commitment to its basic principles. It will also need to have the

capacity to digest and transcend its costly defeats, particularly the recent collapse of the regimes calling themselves Marxist.

More than anything else, it is this political defeat, and not any theoretical refutation, which is the fundamental cause of the current retreat or recession of Marxism. A theoretical refutation of Marxism has indeed not been forthcoming; critics have been happy demolishing, as always, only strawmen, or vulgar and 'lazy' Marxism. The authentic Marxist tradition remains alive and relevant as ever. A dialectical-materialist orientation still helps us in understanding the world and our place in it, and resolving knotty philosophical problems—which also have important implications for our political theory and practice—concerning the relations between being and consciousness, change and determinacy, the general and the particular, the relative and the absolute, the concrete and the abstract, the internal and external in causation, concerning partisanship and objectivity of science, and so on. Historical materialism together with Marxist analysis or critique of capitalism is still the most powerful framework available for understanding and spotlighting the constraints and possibilities in the current world disorder, though it does not predict, or for that matter promise, human survival and transcendence, which is ultimately a matter of effective human intervention. To speak of the end or *final demise* of Marxism is to 'betray a wishful prejudice and rank ignorance of the intellectual and political history of our time. As Norman Geras has put it:

Judged as an intellectual tradition of the kind of breadth and wealth that this one has encompassed, the very question of its end is comical. No less. Of no other intellectual tradition of remotely comparable achievement would such a question even be posed. With historical materialism, Marxism contributed fertile analytical resources to our understanding of history. It mounted a powerful critique of the evils of capitalism. And it set itself to seeking forces for, and ways of, challenging and overcoming them. This is to say nothing of what it offered more generally to the whole culture of a century and more through a legion of thinkers, writers and artists. The celebration of its end is at best wishful thinking and at worst a form of intellectual intolerance.

Geras' statement on Marxism as a critical intellectual tradition makes a point which is important enough to bear repetition in this summing up of my argument concerning Marxism, a point which is also a more specific reason why Marxism remains relevant and need have no fears about its survival. Historical materialism, as the historical and theoretical basis of Marx's critique of capitalism, thereby also provided for the theoretically and politically ambitious liberationist project of classical Marxism: a socialist transition to a communist future for humankind. Marxism, in its anti-capitalist thrust, is the critical science of human emancipation. Yes, if you like, the meta-narrative of science in the service of human emancipation in our time. Within Marxism as a theory and its authentic practice which has linked it to radical or revolutionary popular movements all over the world, two elements have been central: the aim to critically understand the present-day societies where exploitation and inequality continue to exist; and the intention to go beyond criticism of the present in order to build a new society, an exploitation-less society of freedom and equality. Hence Marxism's rejection of capitalism and the argument for its negation in socialism, a call to replace capitalism with a more rational and humane social order. This call to replace capitalism has lost none of its urgency today. For this reason alone, if nothing else, the body of theory that underlines and addresses this call remains as vital and relevant now as it ever was.

The first historically-effective response to this call, the effort to build socialism in the Soviet Union, has no doubt failed. Socialists will long continue to debate this failure, even argue whether it was a massive setback or the disappearance of a liability. They certainly need to analyse and understand this failure, to digest the experience of this political defeat. But the failure of this particular project or even of a whole epoch of such projects, can have no bearing on the need for socialism or on the validity of the theory which articulated that need and continues to do so. The socialist project was conceived, as a way of overcoming the power of capital, a very long time before the Soviet Union came into being; it remains with us for the same reason after the Soviet Union has ceased to be. As has

been well put, 'the real ground of socialist politics was never the existence of the Soviet Union but rather the existence of capitalism'. Indeed, aware that things there had gone grievously wrong, some of us could be said to be socialists despite the Soviet Union.

Socialism always was, and remains, about capitalism. It is, as it always has been, the specific antithesis to capitalism. As long as there is capitalism, the socialist project will have a solid historical foundation, it will remain on humankind's agenda for the future. Of course, after what has happened, there is need for a better, perhaps more precise, understanding of what socialism and the struggle for socialism entails—for instance, what its transitional forms or routes are going to be in different parts of the world or what the practice of revolutionary socialist politics today involves, especially in countries with bourgeois democratic regimes, etc. It has to be an understanding which is fully sensitive to our skeptical times, and adequate enough to cope with the new, unanticipated situation in the world where the first experiment in socialism has failed and capitalism has re-acquired its global domination.

Such or similar renewals of socialist understanding are certainly needed but they are purposeful only within Marxism and not without it. Marxism, in its basic propositions, remains the necessary theory for understanding, criticising and struggling against capitalism as it exists today and works out its logic of accumulation at its centres and in the peripheries. It is all the more necessary because of the renewed global domination of capitalism, which has meant increased economic exploitation of the people everywhere, more ruthless plunder of human and natural resources of the earth, a worldwide moral, cultural and ecological devastation, and all sorts of regressive and disintegrative developments that have followed in its wake—this domination and its displacement or delegitimisation, however partial or temporary, of the socialist alternative and hope has surely something to do with the new resurgence of more or less sophisticated reactionary philosophies, aggressive promotion of a rapacious, consumerist individualism, the murderous outbreaks of chauvinistic

nationalism and racism, xenophobic tribalism and homophobia, religious and other fundamentalisms, and 'terrorism'. That the renewed ideological hegemony of capitalism presently prevents people from seeing all this is a fact. But the situation is changing with every passing year. The objective reality of it all is daily pressing itself into the consciousness of the people. And as people learn through their experience, they will find Marxism helping them to put the right meaning into it, to penetrate the thick veil of bourgeois and associated reactionary ideologies and see the truth of this world, the real source of their misfortunes, and act accordingly.

The world is acknowledgedly in deep trouble today, plagued by a myriad problems. Insofar as it is the world of global capitalism, Marxism remains indispensable for those who would confront these problems with any hope of success. I will only add that this world is populated not only by lovers of capitalism, or its mere victims, or by 'cheerful robots' as C. Wright Mills called them, but also, and increasingly, by some very angry human beings, those still fighting under the darkened skies for a world fit for everyone. Marxism is where they will find the necessary intellectual weapons for their struggles.

What is at stake in the current crisis, therefore, as I stated in the beginning, is not Marxism, whose necessity and future as a critical intellectual tradition and theory of socialism, are well-assured, but the present and future of socialism *in our time*, and this is my basic concern in these notes.

Chapter 3

Socialism—A Negation of Capitalism*

There is a dream, an image of the future in Marx, a certain utopianism, born of a realist understanding of the possibilities of the emerging material conditions and those inhering in the nature of human beings; it is this element in his social theory which makes the meaning, the range and scope of his prophetic sounding statements well worth serious exploration. But Marx is not even remotely a utopian thinker. In Marx's social theory there are no blueprints of the society of the future, no pronouncements about its geographical location or inevitable arrival according to a given time-table. There is no futurology, no predictions about the shape or timing of future events, no determinism of this sort in Marx. Marx's socialism was not a Platonic intellectual construct given in advance, a well-elaborated vision of a 'good society' to be pursued by men of goodwill on this earth. He simply had, as Marx repeatedly insisted, no readymade Utopias to offer. It has been fashionable, especially in recent years, to decry Marxism as an idealistically utopian or messianic doctrine. But Marx himself explicitly rejected *such* utopianism. His work has no elaborate programmes or proposals as to how the future socialist society should work. A concern with such blueprints was indeed a

* A Chapter excerpted from the author's *Crisis of Socialism—Notes in Defence of a Commitment*.

characteristic of Utopian Socialists who sought, according to Marx's expression, 'to boil the pots of the future' and predesign the concrete forms of the transition to a 'classless society', and whom Marx most categorically dissociated from. Describing such blueprints, their 'new social systems', 'best possible plan(s) of the best possible state of society' as 'sentimental socialistic day dreams', 'pure phantasies', 'castles in the air' or 'pocket editions of the New Jerusalem', Marx and Engels saw them to be 'foredoomed as Utopias', though they yet delighted in 'the stupendously grand thoughts and germs of thought that everywhere break out through their phantastic covering'. Admiring both their commitment and contribution to the cause, Marx and Engels took note of the extenuating 'historical situation' that conditioned these early founders of socialism: 'to the crude conditions of capitalistic production and the crude class relations corresponded crude theories'. Their dissociation from such utopianism in fact occurred quite early in their own commitment to socialism. In *The German Ideology*, Marx clearly stated that 'Communism is for us not an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself.' The *Communist Manifesto*, even as it paid its much noted extraordinary tribute to capitalism, concluded with a lengthy and very sharp critique of all then-existing conceptions or doctrines of socialism. Arguing against their utopian, ideological or doctrinaire character, Marx insisted that socialism is not to be cooked up by thinkers in their studies, it should arise from the real movement or historical process going on in society.

This movement or historical process was the development of capitalism. It is Marx's critique of capitalism centred on its mode of appropriation of surplus value from direct producers, which was the point of departure for his theory of socialism. It defined the basic character of socialism as a negation, 'the real other' of capitalism. Its necessary but not sufficient condition was freedom from capitalist exploitation, its expropriation of surplus value, and this involved as a minimum condition the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and its replacement with social ownership. This, admittedly, would be merely the starting point of socialism whose possibilities,

some of these truly amazing, would unfold through its actual existence, though Marx did indicate a few which, even when visualised for a somewhat distant future, may appear implausible or utopian to men or women without vision among us, conditioned, trained and persuaded to under-reach themselves as they are in our class divided, scarcity-driven societies. At times there is indeed the somewhat simplifying hope that once capitalism is swept away, the problems of production or of law or culture, or of political organisation, will be easily manageable, but Marx was on the whole aware of not only the new society inevitably carrying the 'defects' or 'birth marks' of the old capitalist society, from which it emerged, but also that human social powers are cumulative, dialectical and various and that in a socialist society some forms of complexity may be removed but others will be added, posing problems for those actually called upon to build socialism. But these were not *his* problems. He saw socialism as the first phase of communism which marks the end of human 'pre-history' and the beginning—not an end of any kind as it is commonly misrepresented—of 'truly human history' in Engel's expression. But as to the organisation, the institutions, technologies or culture of this 'new historic form', as he called it, Marx had, beyond the sketchiest outline, little or nothing to say.

Marx himself, on his own, simply refused to speculate about the problems that might arise on the soil of the 'new historic form'. He saw it 'intimated' by development of capitalism but, given his perspective of scientific socialism, the question of how to get from the negated world of capitalism to the realm of the merely 'intimated' new historic form played no part in Marx's theoretical project. He indeed scorned those who engaged in such 'speculations about the future' and even considered this a diversion from the real tasks of the day. Though his early metaphorical insistence in this regard—an idea later reiterated on several occasions—that 'they (the working class) have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant' is not free from problems or difficulties of formulation which made it easily amenable to misunderstanding. Meszaros has

aptly commented:

The difficulties concerned the objective constituents of social change on both sides of the equation: the strategies aimed at setting free 'the elements of the new society' on the one hand, and the prospects of development of 'old collapsing bourgeois society' on the other. People tended to read Marx's metaphor with optimistic one-sidedness which ignored its implicit warning: namely, that pregnancies of old wombs often result in miscarriages or badly handicapped offspring.

II

The problems of transition to socialism were never discussed by Marx in detail. The issue, with all its bewildering practical dimensions as we now know, was not an acute historical challenge in Marx's life-time, given the lease of life and new vitality capitalism acquired, above all, on the ground of its imperialist expansion. There are only scattered references to it in different writings of Marx and Engels concerned primarily with characteristics of socialism as a transitional society between capitalism and communism (which they regarded as the goal towards which history was moving). The most important single document of classical Marxism here, that is, on the subject of construction of a new socialist society, is Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*—really Marx's marginal notes to the programme of the German Workers Party, published by Engels after Marx's death, sixteen years after Marx wrote them. (It is interesting to note that sixteen long years had to elapse before Marx's critical notes could be published—in the German Marxist journal, *Neue Zeit*—and even then at the insistence of Engels and only after some bitter fight against powerful opposition and with the omission of 'a few sharp expressions and judgments' and choice of 'milder expression' in some places. Initially, Karl Kautsky, editor of the *Neue Zeit*, along with its publishers, was reluctant to publish this document. And later, some of the Party leaders even tried to withdraw the journal from newsstands. Nor did it all end there. For, following the publication, Engels found himself isolated from his closest German followers, and the 'socialist bosses' continued their

attacks to which Engels had to respond defensively in a letter to Kautsky: 'If we dare not say this [the criticism] openly today, then when?' Marx himself had ended his criticism with the cryptic phrase: *dixi et salvavi animam meam* (I have spoken and saved my soul). It indicated the strange difficulties under which Marx had to write his remarks in the first place—as remarks addressed in strictest confidence to a mere handful of friends: 'only to absolve his conscience and without any hope of success', as Engels later admitted. The radical scepticism of Marx's cryptic phrase at the end of his *Critique* bears witness to his feeling of unease over the newly emerging negative trends in his Party and the working class movement in Germany.

To return to Marx's notes, the very title is significant. The only time Marx is drawn into making a somewhat detailed, yet all too brief, comment on the subject, it is as a critique of his own party or followers in Germany for their confused and shoddy thinking over several issues which also included that concerning the socialist society of the future—a critique distinguished for 'the ruthless severity' and 'mercilessness' typical of Marx in matters of theory. Among the chief purposes of this text was a challenge to propagandist but misleading claims; the contention that labour is the sole source of all wealth is met by insistence that nature is as important, and the claim that workers should receive the full fruits of labour is met by itemisation of the prior charges that should be made for investment, for the further development of material productive resource, etc. Several significant issues are touched upon, but Marx makes no effort to sketch out how the socialist economy should function; he has hardly anything useful to say about the socialisation and coordination of production. Marx, who wrote a great deal about development under capitalism, offers no theory of economic development under socialism. Perhaps such a theory was redundant in view of his belief that socialism will be built in highly developed countries and economic development was the historical task of capitalism. Perhaps there was also the assumption that the rationality of applying labour to social need will become readily apparent once the veil of commodity entitlement has been lifted, or that the unmet human

needs he could see around him require no very complex economic or other assessments and decision making. The fact remains that in line with Marx's view of scientific socialism, the *Critique*, while it indeed clarified and settled many issues, offered no blueprints, nor any directions about giving a practical shape to his theories in this regard. There is not a word about the construction of socialism, about its forms of economic and political organisation, about any other institutional structures of a socialist society, etc. As Engels was to say about his and Marx's overall position later, in 1893: 'Pre-set opinions regarding details of the organisation of future society? You won't find even a hint of them in our works'. But if founders of Marxism did not offer any blueprints of the socialist society of the future and if at all, rarely discussed its characteristics, there is at least one firm statement they made which is most relevant for purpose of my argument in these notes. They more than once expressed the view that socialism is not to be understood as a distinct form of society, like capitalism, one existing in its own right. Instead, they always treated it as a transitional society between capitalism and communism, as the first or lower phase of communism, in every way a transitional period between capitalism and communism; it is communism which Marx as well Engels saw as the society superseding capitalism, the goal towards which humankind was moving as the society of the future.

Marx deliberately refrained from offering any vision or blueprints of a socialist society of the future. With him the most a theory can and must do is to describe the conditions necessary for emancipated forms of life for its time. Characteristic of Marx, therefore, was his concern with the present, with capitalism as it had then emerged as a mature system, and with the future only as it was likely to grow out of this present. It is the historically specific and unique contradictions and possibilities of capitalism that put socialism on the agenda. For Marx, capitalism creates the necessary conditions for socialism, as a more rational and humane form of society that is likely to and must supersede it as the next step in the historical progress of humankind. It is only in this sense that, not a vision or a

blueprint, socialism emerges as a historically privileged form of concrete economic, political, ethical and cultural practice for our times. For Marx, thus, the key task was to understand the ongoing historical process that was capitalism, to discover and lay bare its law of motion, its contradictions and inherent irrationality that made a transition to socialism *necessary*, and to locate the social forces which would make such a transition *possible*. For the rest, he struggled all his life—'sacrificed all my fortune to the revolutionary struggle', as he himself once said—guiding and helping such forces to realise this possibility in the historically specific conditions of his time. While it was possible for Marx to be precise about what must be abolished or superseded, that is capitalism, he obviously would not do what is impossible and impermissible for his mode of thinking, that is to draw up, like the Utopians, precise or detailed pictures of socialism in advance. He simply refused to compose such 'music of the future' as he himself put it. This precision or detail, the socialist organisation and management of society, is a matter for the succeeding generations, their concrete social praxis, to work out. The responsibility for the concrete carrying out of the socialist liberationist project, for shaping their own destiny, can lie only with them, the men and women of the future. It is their task. It is thus that they will 'make their own history'.

That Marx and Engels never offered any blueprints, or shared in the loose usage of the term 'socialism' current in the nineteenth century, or at times, like others, even used 'socialism' and 'communism' interchangeably, does not mean that they had nothing worthwhile to say about this society of the future. On the contrary, they do provide us with a reasonably coherent idea of what they understood to be socialism. This is not only clearly expressed in several places in their writings, in passages which are full of flashes of insight as well as more mundane propositions, about the kind of society they thought would and should succeed the capitalist society. It is most explicit in their critique of capitalism—for, as already indicated, Marx's socialism was not just another vision of a good society, it was above all a negation of capitalism in a most comprehensive manner, its dialectical transcendence—a negation and

transcendence of not only its economy but its ethics, politics, ideology, culture, indeed its mode life as a whole. (In this regard Marx himself spoke of 'Aufhebung', which is a complex historical process of 'supersession-preservation-raising to a higher level'.)

We may therefore well take a quick look at Marx's critique of capitalism to not only notice the continuing validity of this critique but also, more immediately relevant, get some insight into how socialism was visualised in classical Marxism.

III

Holding that 'the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy', Marx focused his attention on the study of capitalist economy in order to understand the dynamics of the capitalist social order. It is to this task that he devoted the better part of his working life and most of his mature efforts. The result was a truly prodigious contribution to knowledge. So great was this achievement that, aided by the tendency of his followers to erroneously attribute an influence to the different social spheres in proportion to the treatment accorded them in Marx's published writings, it soon gave rise to the view, which still persists, that Marx was primarily an economist and Marxism's chief concern is with matters economic only. Marxists in the West, coming after Marx, lent their support to this view, as it came to be well-manifested in the economic interpretations and 'scientism' of the Second International. This, however, is not our concern at the moment. Immediately important is to notice that, at a time when the advent of capitalism was being either celebrated for its tremendous economic or productive achievements, *a la* Adam Smith and others, or condemned for the truly disastrous consequences of its unrestrained industrialism by morally sensitive writers of the age—Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, Dickens, among others—it was the distinction of Marx to recognise both the historical achievement of capitalism as well as its inherent irrationality and inhumanity, and therefore the transitory character of the new mode of production.

'The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most

revolutionary part' Marx pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto*: 'It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about', creating 'more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together'. 'What earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour', wrote Marx. (In view of the scientific and technological revolutions of our times, this could be said to be true of Marx's own century, though Marx himself can be seen as looking forward to such revolutions to provide the necessary material basis for what he visualised as communist society of the future). Marx sought to locate the driving force behind this unprecedented productive achievement of capitalism. In doing so, in a truly remarkable intellectual effort, Marx laid bare 'the economic law of motion', the structural logic of capitalism, which Adam Smith's benevolent interpretation had wished away as the 'hidden' or invisible hand of 'Providence'. The essence of capitalism, Marx argued, is the self-expansion of capital, an expansion whose norms are unashamedly quantitative. As he put it: 'Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets! ... Accumulate for accumulation's sake, production for production's sake; by this formula classical economy expressed the historical mission of the bourgeoisie and did not for a single moment deceive itself over the birth-throes of wealth'.

This self expansion or accumulation of capital takes place through the production and capitalisation of surplus value, produced by the expropriated proletariat, who now produces for capital and not for the satisfaction of its own or anyone else's needs. It is thus that capitalism, in Marx's words, 'establishes an accumulation of misery corresponding with accumulation of capital'. The accumulation of capital goes hand in hand with 'the expropriation and pauperisation of the great mass of producers', wealth and affluence at one end is accompanied by poverty and deprivation at the other. Speaking of 'the absolute general law of capitalist development'—such laws for Marx are always 'laws of tendency'—Marx wrote: 'Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time, accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental

degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own products in the form of capital'.

Capitalism, without doubt, is no longer what it was in the nineteenth century when Marx wrote this; it has undergone many important changes. Certainly in its later development, this structurally inherent tendency in capitalism has been somewhat, but only somewhat, curbed in the countries of advanced capitalism, by the working class resistance, by state intervention generally in the long-term interests of capitalism itself, by the historically determined emergence of the welfare, rather welfare-warfare state. But the dualism in society that Marx noticed, the outcome of the structural logic of capitalism, has persisted and tended to grow (despite 'welfare' which remains reversible, is always resisted and has been again, as often in the past, under capitalist attack in recent years). As the French saying has it, 'the more it changes, the more it remains the same'. Capital accumulation, often generalised as economic growth, remains the holy grail which dominates capitalism's working, economic discourse of its ideologues, and public policy of capitalist states. And the consequences are necessarily dualist, always and everywhere, within countries and across them globally.

For Marx, the tendency of capitalism to generate wealth at one end and poverty at the other, whether on the national or international scale is a consequence of the exploitative socio-economic relations on which it is based. These exploitative socio-economic relations continue to constitute capitalism even today. The laws of capitalist accumulation still impose themselves, in Marx's words, 'as an external coercive force' on the capitalist, and poverty amidst affluence remains the characteristic feature of all capitalist societies in our times. As Harry Magdoff has written:

New features of twentieth century capitalism—such as the growing role of monopoly capital, imperialism, internationalization of production and finance, and the spread of the welfare state in the center—affected but did not change what was essential in the laws of motion discovered long ago by Karl Marx. Despite the great advances in science and technology, major wars, and other historic developments, one feature of capitalist development

prevailed; the forces of production expanded side by side with the growth of misery; the gap between wealth and poverty among and within nations continued to widen.

The reason for this consistency is that there is a logical connection between the system's achievements and its failures. The market system under the guidance of the profit motive generates an urgent need for capital to accumulate, which by the inner necessity of the system leads to capital's exploitation of most of the people on the planet and of the planet itself. This interconnection is at the heart of capitalism's laws of motion: underlying tendencies which, even though approximate and modified by historical developments, assert themselves as a blind, elemental force, independent of the aims and decisions of those active in the economy.

It was part of Marx's critique that while transition from feudalism to capitalism represented a tremendous advance towards a more rational condition of humankind, the inherent irrationality of capitalism itself, as a system of private property and profit-based market economy, would warp and hinder further economic and social progress. Hence the transitory character of capitalism. The structural logic of capitalism, its accumulative process generating wealth and poverty at opposite poles, inevitably leads to recurring crises of 'over production'—people's purchasing power again and again failing to match the increasing production that capitalists put in the market. As Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*:

In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in earlier periods, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of over production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce.

And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other by the conquest of new markets and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

Marx saw these crises as an expression of 'the revolt of modern productive forces against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and its rule', and therefore indicative of the need to overcome and abolish these property relations to make possible production geared not to profit in the market place, but to satisfaction of people's needs.

'Crisis of overproduction' or excess-capacity has been a perennial tendency in capitalism. Such slumps or crises at regular intervals—except under exceptional circumstances such as war or accelerated preparation for war, for example—have been a characteristic feature of capitalism from at least 1825 on, with capitalism's internal mechanisms becoming increasingly inadequate to cope with them, making it necessary for the capitalist state to intervene to save capitalism, as it were, from the capitalists; left to themselves, capitalists would have most probably destroyed capitalism a long time ago. In exploring this essential irrationality within capitalism, Marx saw and defined the basic contradiction of this mode of production as a contradiction between its socialised production and private, that is capitalist, appropriation so that, under capitalism it becomes difficult, and increasingly impossible to use the available or potential productive resources either fully or for the good of society, for human welfare as a whole. The huge disparity between its 'colossal' productive capacity and the quality of life it delivers is indeed the most obvious fact about capitalism today. Hence the Marxist argument for *socialist* relations of production and appropriation, for socialism as a more rational and humane social order; in its economic aspects, a 'free society of associated producers' making a democratically planned use of its social and material productive resources for common human welfare.

Aware and appreciative of the creative drives of capitalism, Marx was remarkably prescient about its destructive drives or potential in the long run, and his prognosis here was thus summed up by Rosa Luxemburg: 'either an advance to socialism or a descent into barbarism'. Again, Marx has been more than vindicated. Barbarism of sorts has already emerged as an important aspect of the social, political and moral-cultural life

of contemporary capitalist societies. And capitalism's potential for wholesale barbarism is today more than visible in the imperialist politics of the capitalist powers, the United States' stockpile and use of weapons of mass destruction and 'Star Wars' programmes ('Strategic Defence Initiative', 'missile defence system', 'Falcon', etc.) and in the ecological disaster which, thanks to the structural logic of capitalism, its insatiable accumulative drive, now looms large over the future of humankind. The issue 'socialism or barbarism', implicit in Marx's prognosis, is indeed more urgent today than when Marx first sounded the warning. (I will have more to say on this subject later in these notes.)

It is characteristic of Marx's critique of capitalism, in fact of his entire mode of thinking, which does not recognise the conventional, academically fashionable disjunction between 'is and ought', (fact and value), that even as he analysed the structurally inherent contradictions of capitalism, its essential irrationality and its consequences, he also recognised capitalism as generating, in the course of its historical development, the necessary prerequisites of a more rational and humane social order—not an external idea or a vision imposed on history but a projection or extension, so to speak, of trends and patterns within capitalism itself. Of course, socialism itself cannot take root and grow within the confines of capitalist society as capitalism had done under feudalism. But capitalism has a characteristic historical role which not only makes possible but guarantees the existence of a different road to its transformation. Capitalism creates the *objective* material basis for socialism in the social productive forces it develops but now increasingly fetters in their use for human welfare, and it simultaneously brings into existence the *subjects* of history, the political and ideological force needed to carry out the necessary revolutionary transformation. This social force Marx located in the proletariat which even as it is essential to capitalism for its accumulation process, is also its essential victim, and one that is rapidly gaining a 'theoretical awareness' of its real situation. As capitalism grows, so does the proletariat, and the very process of capitalist development prepares the proletariat for its

historical role. As Marx wrote: 'What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable'. It is this understanding of a most important aspect of the internal dynamics of capitalism that underlies Marx's insistence that 'Communism is not... an ideal to which reality (will) have to adjust itself (but) the real movement which abolishes the present state of affairs'.

That is how Marx visualised the necessity as well as the possibility of a transition from capitalism to socialism in the countries of advanced industrial development, with their mature productive basis and proletarian presence. And it is here, not his analysis of capitalism or argument for socialism—both of which remain as valid and relevant as ever—but his historically specific prognosis concerning the necessity and possibility of socialism in the advanced capitalist countries, that history, as it were, played a trick with the doctrine of Karl Marx, whose one major consequence is the current crisis of socialism. But of this later.

IV

Socialism as negation of capitalism of course means a thorough-going transformation of property relations and abolition of private profit as the organising principle of production, a genuine, not merely formal or juridical social ownership of the commanding heights of the economy and democratically planned use of social-material resources for human welfare. These are, however, necessary rather than sufficient conditions for socialism, and certainly not a description of socialism. For Marx the negation involved very much more than such necessary transformation of economic arrangements, 'the subordination of (people's) common social productivity as their (own) social power', as he put it.

'The mode of production', according to Marx, 'must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of expressing their life, "a definite mode of life" on their part'. Capitalism as a mode of production, for example, completely

subordinates human needs to the reproduction of exchange-value in the interest of capital's expanded self-realisation, which makes it pre-eminently a system not only of accumulation, but of commodification as well, which in its immediate working and ultimate outcome seeks to commodify every aspect of social life or human existence. In socialism, as Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, humans must change 'from top to bottom the conditions of their industrial and political existence, and consequently *their whole manner of being*'. Central to this changed 'manner of being' is the end of a private-property-governed and commodified existence, the 'unfreedom' of capitalist social order and the beginning, in Marx's words, of 'free individuality based on the universal development of the individual' in a socialist society. In other words, socialism is a society ensuring the 'free development' of its members, 'the associated producers', enabling them to realise their human powers, needs and capacities in as rich, untrammelled and all-round manner as possible. It is by the unleashing of actual productive forces that these human powers and capacities are bred and only by transformation of the social relations of production that the conditions in which they can flourish all-round can be created.

This draws our attention to an aspect of Marx's argument concerning capitalism that we need to notice for the light it throws on his idea of socialism, rather the *revolutionary humanist ambition* of his idea of socialism. This is the ethical and aesthetic-cultural dimension of his critique of capitalism, expressing a concern that everything Marx wrote is suffused with, and is in fact a distinctive feature of his social theory. Though this dimension never came to be theorised by him—unlike the economics of capitalism—Marx's humanist concern is an ever-present motivating force in his work as a thinker and a revolutionary.

Underlying Marx's humanist concern in his view of man, of man's *essential* humanity, his intrinsic being or immanent nature, the evolution-produced special property as a human being that, beyond the 'mere bodily' or 'mundane' activity and needs which in his own way he shares with other living beings,

distinguishes man from them, his 'species-being' as Marx called it. Marx expressed this *differentia specifica* of man in such phrases as 'conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity', 'free conscious activity is man's species character', 'freedom is thoroughly the essence of man', 'conscious and purposive activity that 'distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees', etc. This is how Marx viewed human nature in general, which then comes to be modified in each historical epoch; his species-distinctive capacity being determined and developed but more often also limited, curtailed, mutilated or perverted in the course of his socio-historical development, more specially under capitalism.

Speaking of Marx's *Capital*, Che Guevara had once pointed out that 'the magnitude of this monumental achievement of human intelligence is such that we are often oblivious to the profoundly humanist (in the best sense of the word) nature of its interests'. In other words, Marx's humanist concern was an integral part of his critique of capitalism as an economic system. Apart from several brilliantly insightful passages on the human condition under capitalism, *Capital's* vocabulary on the subject is characterised by an indignant and relentless use of such terms as 'brutalizing', 'alienating', 'monstrous', 'savage', 'ghoulish', 'bestial', 'inhuman', and so on. Marx's humanist concern is equally well expressed in several sharp passages of the *Communist Manifesto*. But this concern—what is man?, how capitalism limits, distorts or damages his essential humanity? and what can man become? —is somewhat more elaborately stated in his early writings. Its most explicit expression is in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, with its focus on human condition, the alienated existence of human beings, in capitalist society. And Marx's argument of 150 years ago today stands more than vindicated. Witness to it is the extraordinary interest *Manuscripts* have evoked, and the endorsement its argument has received, in our times, especially in the countries of advance capitalism, making *Manuscripts* one of the half-a-dozen most discussed writings of the post-second world war period. Apropos non-Marxist western scholars' interest in this and related writings of Marx, it is interesting to

note that while some of them have indeed shown a real desire to understand him and written with sympathy and perception, not a few have sought, some of them so very desperately, to so focus on these writings as to separate Marx from himself and from Marxism—to separate the young Marx from the old, the 'idealistic', 'freedom-loving' Marx of *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* from the supposedly cynical and disillusioned Marx of *Capital*, Marx the humanist from Marx the revolutionary and an advocate of class struggle, Marx from Engels, and, of course, from Lenin and Mao Tse-tung and any radical movement; he was now their own humanist and 'Western' Marx, having nothing to do with revolution or 'the East'.

At the heart of Marx's ethical and aesthetic-cultural critique of capitalism lies his deep concern for humanity, its present condition and possible future. Central to his argument is the idea (particularly expressed, along with *Manuscripts of 1844*, in his other early writings such as *On the Jewish Question*, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, *The Holy Family*, etc.) that man, stripped of 'his human essence' when he first fell into the class of exploited, faces 'the destruction of all humanity' in him under capitalism. The process of capitalist exploitation, with its attendant 'greed and the war between the greedy—competition', not only holds the entire society, the capitalist as well as the worker, in its irresistible compulsive grip and at the mercy of 'the blind forces' of the market, it also transforms free creative self-activity of man into alienated labour, and reduces man himself to a commodity. It 'estranges man from nature, from himself, his own active functioning... from his *universal essence*.... It makes his *essence* into a mere means for his existence.... (and results in) the alienation of *man* from *man*.' Capitalism tears up 'all genuine bonds between men' and replaces them by selfishness, dissolving 'the world of men into a world of atomized individuals, hostile towards each other'. It leaves 'no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment"' and resolves 'personal worth into exchange value'. The very things which were once 'communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction,

knowledge, conscience, etc.'—now become marketable and pass 'into commerce'; 'the *divine* power of money' overturns and confounds 'all human and natural qualities' in the marketplace. There comes to be generated a savage lust for money and property, a maniacal obsession with the accumulation of capital, a veritable fanaticism of appropriation. Amassing wealth becomes the supreme object of human endeavour and the final criterion of human success. The emphasis is on acquisitiveness and the only success that matters is the success of the market place, resulting in 'that whole system of appetites and values' which 'with its deification of the life of snatching to hoard, and hoarding to snatch' leaves, as Tawney wrote, 'a taste as of ashes on the lips of a civilization which has brought to the conquest of its material environment resources unknown in earlier ages, but which has not yet learned to master itself'. And all this leaves man, even the so-called rich man of capitalism, 'ever poorer as a *man*', robbed of real life and crippled in his inner being.

Marx, in line with his mode of thinking, took a historical view of the growth of needs and desires of human beings as one aspect of the general development of human nature, which is also the subjective aspect of the growth of human powers and capacities. With the development of our powers and capacities new needs emerge; and the growth of new needs spurs the development of new powers. As Marx saw this process, it is 'the absolute working out of (man's) creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development', which makes 'this totality of development,' i.e. the development of human powers as such 'an end in itself', not to be measured on any *predetermined* yardstick. Human development in this perspective is the growth of human capacities and powers, the actualisation of human potentialities, the self-development and self-realisation of human beings. This however must not be understood in any utilitarian or hedonistic manner. Central to the growth of human powers and capacities is the development of the specifically human faculties, the creative, aesthetic faculties of human beings, their 'glorious human senses'. For Marx, like the evolution-produced five physical senses, these too are 'the work of all previous history'. Marx wrote: 'The most

beautiful music has *no* sense for the unmusical ear, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers.... For the same reasons the *senses* of social man are *different* from those of non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded wealth of human nature can the wealth of subjective *human* sensitivity—a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, *senses* capable of human gratification—be either cultivated or created.'

This is surely suggestive of an infinite future of creation and cultivation of 'the wealth of subjective *human* sensitivity,' of specifically human senses, which is really the same as human nature all the time *becoming more human*. And the important point is that, for Marx, the exercise of these naturally and historically produced specifically human senses—the sense for music and poetry, art, science and history, love, justice and compassion, and so on—constituted the very essence of a truly human appropriation of life and nature, a genuinely rich human life. That is how, in pointing out the alienating, depersonalising and dehumanising consequences of capitalism, Marx particularly focused attention on the fact that for all the glorious human senses, whose active and concrete exercise alone constitutes the true content of a genuinely rich human life, capitalism substitutes a single abstract sense, the sense for property, a particular, historically transient, substitute sense which plays havoc with human personality and plunges man, in the words of Ladislav Stoll, 'into the terrible inner sickness of a dehumanised world'. Marx wrote: 'In place of *all* these physical and mental senses there has ... come the sheer estrangement of *all* these senses—the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world'. 'The more you *have*', said Marx, 'the less you *are*'. Hence his insistence that 'the transcendence of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes'. He spoke of communism, 'the *actual* phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery', 'as the positive transcendence of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the

real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development.' Marx added: 'What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of "Society" as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual is the *social being*. His life ... is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*.' Marx is an individualist in the basic sense that his ultimate vision was a society where every individual could be a fully human being, where, as Marx himself put it, 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

What this 'free development', the above-mentioned 'transcendence of human self-estrangement' means, what Marx meant when early in his life he wrote (in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*) that 'communism equals humanism', and towards the end spoke (in *Capital*, Vol. III) of 'the true realm of freedom' which makes possible 'that development of human power, which is its own end', what vision of the genuinely rich human life lay behind his life-long struggle for socialism—this has been well expressed by Ladislav Stoll. Pointing out that 'in place of many-sided, active, concrete appropriation of life and the world, through which the individual says not only "I see, I hear, I smell, I taste, I touch", but also, "I work, I study, I love, I admire, I struggle for a happier tomorrow"—in place of all this wealth of emotion capitalism makes one single emotion supreme: "I have!"', Stoll writes:

The truly human way of appropriating the world's riches is that by which man really overcomes the world, in other words, with all his senses, concretely. And here it is not a question only of the five physical senses, for unlike the animals man has a whole series of glorious human senses, not only the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, but also a sense for music, a sense for poetry, a sense for the plastic arts, a sense for science, a sense for mathematics, a sense for history, crystallography, etc. etc. It is only when a man begins to satisfy the needs of these glorious human senses, which one and all are the product of historical development, that he can appropriate to himself all the beauties of the world and become genuinely rich.

In a related comment on Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844*, Erich Fromm has written:

Socialism, for Marx, is a society which permits the actualization of man's essence, by overcoming his alienation. It is nothing less than creating the conditions for the truly free, rational, active and independent man; it is the fulfilment of the prophetic aim: the destruction of the ideals ... For Marx, the aim of socialism was freedom ... based on man's standing on his own feet, using his own powers and relating himself to the world productively.

V

An aspect of Marx's analysis of capitalism, which deserves to be specifically noticed, is his brilliant anticipation of what we have come to recognise as 'consumerism', an increasingly dominant and deeply disturbing and destructive bane of life in contemporary capitalist societies, which Marx castigated as the 'true norm' of capitalism. Marx saw human nature as modifiable in history. He had written: 'Our desires and pleasures spring from society, we measure them, therefore, by society and not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature'. And however arisen, they continue to be modified, gain or lose in importance, with changing social conditions. Take, for instance, such pathological phenomena as greed or selfishness. Capitalism did not invent them; they are deep in human nature, related as they are to elementary infantile structures and the overall determining situation of *scarcity* which has characterised civilisation throughout and so far. But capitalism has undoubtedly magnified their role in ordinary life, and, unlike its predecessor feudal or other pre-capitalist social formations, which had the (Christian or analogous) grace to condemn greed or selfishness, capitalism even celebrates them. For Marx, therefore, 'consumerism' is not a matter of human nature as such, of its so-called insatiable appetites, but of a human nature desired, moulded and manipulated by capitalism as a market-based system of private property and profit making. Capitalism invariably tends, via profitability in the marketplace, to drive a wedge between human *needs* and human *wants*, and

to proliferate the wants in a manner that, as Baran once said, 'people steeped in the culture of monopoly capitalism do not want what they need and do not need what they want'. Capitalism irresistibly gives rise to consumerism which is essentially the artificial, market determined and mediated, stimulation of consumption for private profit under capitalism. In an extended comment, with an opening reference to socialism, Marx wrote in the *Manuscripts of 1844*:

We have seen what significance, given socialism, the *wealth* of human needs has, and what significance, therefore, both a *new mode of production* and a new *object* of production have: a new manifestation of the forces of *human nature* and a new enrichment of *human nature*. Under private property their significance is reversed: every person speculates on creating a *new* need in another, so as to drive him to a fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of *gratification* and therefore economic ruin. Each tries to establish over the other an *alien* power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need. The increase in the quantity of objects is accompanied by an extension of the realm of alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new *potency* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering. Man becomes ever poorer as man.... *Excess* and *intemperance* come to be (capitalism's) true norm... the extension of products and needs falls into *contriving* and ever-calculating subservience to inhuman, refined, unnatural and *imaginary* appetites....

Marx added:

and no eunuch flatters his despot more basely or uses more despicable means to stimulate his dulled capacity for pleasure in order to sneak a favour for himself than does the industrial eunuch—the producer—to sneak for himself a few pennies... He puts himself in the service of the other's most depraved fancies, plays the pimp between him and his need, excites in him morbid appetites, lies in wait for each of his weaknesses....

VI

For Marx, the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialist economy does not by itself usher in a 'truly human society', it only makes it possible. Material fulfilment is for him

only the condition, the necessary basis, and not the sum, of man's 'spiritual', that is, 'truly human' fulfilment. The vision which underlies his whole work from the early 1840s to the end is the vision of 'human emancipation'. His life and struggle was a plea to replace the pitiable, fragmentary and self-alienated existence, which is man's lot in a class-divided and exploitative society that is capitalism, with a truly rich human life; it was an assertion of life abundant against mere existence. Socialism opens up the possibility of this abundant life. More than ending the economic exploitation of a capitalist market system, it will make for direct cooperative socio-economic relations between people such that they cease to be alienated from the product of their labour, from nature and their fellow human beings, and from themselves. And as socialism transits to communism, with the productive forces further developed, all the springs of collective wealth flowing freely, labour become not merely a means but prime necessity of life, and the personality-diminishing excesses of division of labour eliminated, the way will be open for the full flowering of man's creative potentialities, his glorious human senses, for 'the unfolding of man', 'the all round development of the individual', as Marx put it.

Early in his life, this is how Marx saw this 'unfolding' or 'all round development', or looked beyond the reduction of human work to dictated 'mindless detail task' that division of labour under capitalism entails:

as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.... (No longer a human being needs to be exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc.... In a communist society there

are no painters, but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.

In another celebrated passage, now towards the end of his life, Marx saw socialism in its transition to communism as humankind's transition to 'the realm of freedom' which according to him lies beyond material pursuits, beyond all activity geared to economic needs. He wrote:

...The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus *in the very nature of things* it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all modes of production.... Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by a blind power; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human power which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.

The aspirations or vision that Marx here sets forth is in fact as old as civilisation; it is there, for instance, in Plato and Aristotle, though its realisation, then and afterwards, was seen possible only for a few. Marx put more substance into this aspiration and sought its realisation for *all* human beings. In other words, economic activity was, throughout, deemed to have meaning only if it serves something other than itself. For Marx this is activities 'valued as an end in themselves' (as he phrased it in the *Grundrisse*), which for him is indeed 'the true measure of wealth'.

A first condition for such a shift of balance in human activity from 'the realm of necessity' to 'the realm of freedom' is obviously a reduction in socially necessary labour time that economic activity involves. Society would have to be able to produce sufficient to satisfy the necessities of material existence

without absorbing all the time and effort of its people. Marx saw this becoming a distinct possibility, for the first time, with the productive achievements of capitalism (and those he visualised under socialism). Compared with the means these achievements put at our disposal, 'the theft of somebody else's labour time, on which wealth now rests, appears a miserable base', wrote Marx. To take 'working time as the standard of wealth,' Marx argued, 'is to base wealth on poverty, ...reducing time as a whole to working time and degrading the individual to the simple role of the working man, dominated by his labour.' This was becoming no longer necessary, and the possibility existed for moving towards a qualitatively different society in which, as Marx put it, 'the surplus labour of the masses will no longer be the condition for the development of general wealth as the leisure of the few will cease to be the condition for the full development of the human brain.' Herein lay the hope and promise of the future, a real basis for Marx's vision of a transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom where there is 'free individuality' and 'the development of human power is an end in itself'. Here at last, in Marx's famous 1859 formulation, the 'pre-history' of humanity ends and its 'history' begins. For Marx, it is this beginning that socialism represents.

It has been fashionable in a society vitally interested in persuading its victims to underreach themselves, to decry and dismiss Marx's vision of socialism as something 'utopian', a 'romantic' or 'millennial' dream. One can only ask such critics or sceptics to shed their myopia and look at the world around them with a little less prejudice and more courage, for utopian or not so utopian for his age, Marx was remarkably prophetic for us; his vision is very much a realistic proposition today with the magnificent possibilities now being opened up for humankind by the scientific-technological revolutions of our time—provided, of course, these revolutions are used not for stoking up the furnaces of private profit and privilege, or making wars, as it is bound to be under capitalism, but for the benefit of humanity at large which socialism may not guarantee but certainly makes possible.

VII

Socialism, as Marx visualised it, is a negation of capitalism, its transcendence in the strict sense of Marxian dialectic. It is a new society different from and beyond the bourgeois society, operating according to radically different principles. In its material or economic structural basis, with the dissolution of private property and supersession of the *capitalist* market, it is 'a society of free and associated producers', 'whose social relations are subordinated to their own collective control', making them masters of their own lives and destiny; it will have put an end to that separation of the direct producers from the conditions of production which is one of the basic characteristics of capitalism. This is the essential meaning of replacing the private with 'social ownership of the means of production'—social not in a formal sense or juridically ordained but, as Marx had insisted, 'in its *real* configuration'. Unlike capitalism, which treats people as a means for the expansion, 'the self-expression', of capital—the root cause of its manifold contradictions and evils—socialism, according to Marx, is 'an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their... labour power in full self-awareness', 'a society of civilised cooperators' in Lenin's words, for whom the means of production, indeed all human and natural resources, are simply the means for satisfying genuine human needs, for shaping an ever better and fuller life for themselves. With social ownership of the means of production and the accompanying allocation of resources by 'conscious plan', instead of by 'the blind forces' of the market as under capitalism, it becomes possible to move towards greater equality and the eventual elimination of classes, of state as coercive public power, and of invidious distinctions between manual and mental labour and between city and country. In its ultimate outcome it will also mean replacement of all money and commodity relations by direct human relations and the ending of 'the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour', thus ensuring 'the all round development of the individual' and, the way we have noticed earlier, a non-alienated, 'truly rich' human life for all. As Marx himself put it: 'In place of the old bourgeois

society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

Such briefly was Marx's view of socialism—a view born of a masterful socio-historical analysis and lit up, as everything with Marx always was, by the touch of a certain *Traum* (*Dream*) that he carried with him throughout his life. A vision, it was yet rooted in real life; profoundly insightful of the present, it was remarkably prophetic about possibilities of the future, the promise as well as the threat it holds, both of which have today already become compellingly real, confronting humanity with possibly the most momentous choice of its long history: 'socialism or barbarism'. And it is this view of the situation that helps us understand how socialism was also a programme of struggle for Marx who was always disdainful of ideas and thoughts not carried into praxis.

VIII

Insofar as socialism is born of and validated by Marx's critique of capitalism—socialism as the necessary and possible negation of capitalism—it bears restating that nothing that has happened since the days of Marx vitiates or refutes the essentials of his argument. The socialist critique of capitalism in terms of its economic irrationality and the inequality and alienation it generates, has lost none of its sharpness. As we have already noticed, a certain curbing of capitalism's predatory structural logic has indeed been possible in the countries of advanced capitalism, not the least because of the powerful *civilising* influence of the sheer presence of 'actually existing socialism' (which is not to deny the decisive part played by the working class struggles). State has been compelled, often in the interests of the continued existence of capitalism itself, to provide some protection to people against capital's worst depredations. But while some of its worst expressions may have been thus taken care of and some forms altered, primarily in the more advanced parts of the capitalist world, the basic irrationality and inhumanity is even today, as in the days of Marx, a characteristic structural feature of capitalism in every capitalist

country, North or South, and on a global scale. In some ways it has been even more pervasive, pronounced and threatening in our times.

Marx's analysis and critique of capitalism, his prognosis has indeed stood up well at the level of essentials and often even at the level of details. There has been the increasing concentration and centralisation of capital, the massive merger movement into ever larger financial and industrial conglomerates and the increasing subordination of national competitive capital to global, multinational corporations, making 'globalisation' another buzz word of our times. There have been increasingly severe recurrent economic crises. An unprecedented 'degradation of work', as Braverman calls it, has occurred and labour has become ever more alienating. There is a pervasive moral and cultural disorientation which is nowhere better manifested than in the emergence of 'alienation' as a major and ever-worsening phenomenon in contemporary capitalist societies. Alienation under capitalism is today far more pronounced, far more inclusive and monstrous, than when Marx first wrote about it. It has found varied expression in man's growing sense of anomie and estrangement, of isolation, loneliness and homelessness, of hostility and frustration. The so-called advanced capitalist societies are today sick with these and a hundred other social and psychic ailments born of the essential irrationality of capitalism, sick with apathy and boredom, with 'other-directedness', conformism and self-abasement, with insanity, drugs and crime, all symptoms of 'the terrible inner sickness' of an 'acquisitive society' that has lasted too long. Witness to it all is the massive and still mounting literature on these pathological themes in countries of advanced capitalism. Countries on the periphery or semi-periphery of the global capitalist system are suffering from parallel, in many ways worse, somewhat lumpen or comprador, consequences of the historically specific capitalisms they have spawned in the post-colonial era—material, moral and cultural consequences of which are today all too painfully evident in their economy, politics and social life, in their steadily degenerating codes of moral and social behaviour.

As Marx foresaw, capitalism has grown and expanded to become a *deadly* serious business. Constituted, essentially, by class exploitation, capitalism is today more than just a system of class oppression, of economic inequalities and iniquities. It is a ruthless totalising process which seeks to shape our lives in every conceivable sphere, everywhere, in the relative opulence of the capitalist North as much as in its impoverished peripheries, subjecting all social life, through the manifold power of capital, to the abstract requirements of the market, commodifying life in all its aspects. This makes a mockery of all our values, all our aspirations to autonomy, freedom of choice and democratic self-government, all that is good, decent and worthwhile in life. Marx had noticed this at the very beginning of modern capitalism and warned us. Today his warning rings more true than ever before. As does the warning about its overall destructive potential in the long run.

Such being the case, regardless of what has happened to the so-called 'socialist world' or is likely to happen to what is left of the old communist or socialist movements, the struggle against capitalism and for socialism will go on—in a sense it could even be said to have truly begun now that capitalism has really attained a global reach. The socialist project is not dead. It bears repeating that this project arose out of opposition to capitalism; the ideas of socialism are basically a negation of capitalism. Therefore so long as capitalism exists, socialism too continues to be. It is true that the Russian Revolution did not hold, its socialist project has failed. But capitalism remains and therefore the socialist project remains. The collapse of 'actually existing socialism' is certainly not the end of socialism. It is indeed myopic, historically as well as politically and morally, for socialists anywhere to either abandon Marx's argument for socialism or reduce it to a search for 'capitalism with a human face', some version of social democracy that better realises the publicly stated ideals and values of contemporary bourgeois society—something that has itself become problematic, if not impossible. (Incidentally, social democracy is what the theoretically and politically bankrupt Soviet leadership of *glasnost* and *perestroika* days aspired for, only to be inevitably abandoned for lumpen capitalism by its successors).

The real issues for people's politics everywhere today lie not with Marx's argument for socialism, they arise only *after* it; they concern the struggle for socialism. And one thing that can be averred with any certainty amidst the current flux of human affairs is that, capitalism being what it is, it is the issues concerning this struggle which will soon assert themselves in the capitalist world, if they are not in different ways already doing so. The historically significant question today is neither the so-called triumph of capitalism, nor abstract explorations into the future of humankind, but the concrete need, in all societies of capitalism, at the centre or in the periphery, for a politics that seeks to move, slow or fast, depending upon the moral and material resources available in each case, against and away from capitalism in a programme that aims at socialism, at a more or less prolonged transition to socialism. Really important and decisive for our times are the issues relating to the politics of social transformations for which socialism remains the programmatic vision that inspires and guides.

IX

The construction of socialism, or communist society proper, itself constitutes a long period of transition. That is how Marx visualised it. He had also pointed out: 'what we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges'. But, as we have already noticed, Marx simply refused to speculate about the economic or political organisation of this society of the future. If there is little in Marx or Engels about its economic structure beyond some very general propositions, there is even less about its political arrangements. But there is one issue concerning the politics of this transition which Marx touched upon when he spoke of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' that needs to be considered, however briefly. It is necessary to do so, not only because of the intrinsic importance of the issue, or because there is a great deal of unnecessary confusion over it among friends

and foes of socialism, but above all because whatever the problems with the 'administrative command economy', Soviet central planning or Soviet economy as a whole, properly understood, that is not in isolation from economic-structural or class issues, a decisively important source of Soviet crisis and cause of the ultimate collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union lay, not in the realm of its economy, but here in the realm of its politics, its failure to practice the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as Marx and Engels, and following them Lenin himself visualised it.

The book on 'the State' originally planned by Marx—as the sequel to *Capital*, it was supposed to develop the political implications of Marx's global theory—never came to be written; it is an important missing dimension of his unfinished theoretical project. Marx did stipulate a *political form* (the proletarian state) under which the transition from the old to the new society was to be accomplished, a transitional state—'the political form of social emancipation', 'the Communal form of political organisation'—which was not a state in the conventional sense and destined to ultimately wither away. But the stipulation was not even sketched, let alone fully worked out. Amidst the scattered reference to the political problems of a transitional socialist society and a few general observations on the Paris Commune, what stands out is Marx's concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', its untheorised status a source of much confusion and abuse among friends and foes of socialism.

Marx recognised that 'every provisional state set up after a revolution requires a dictatorship and an energetic dictatorship at that'; a proposition well testified to by the historical experience of the successful bourgeois revolutions of the past—in England in the seventeenth century (Cromwell), and in America (Washington) and France (Robespierre's Jacobins) in the eighteenth—as well as by the successful (e.g. the Bolsheviks in Russia) or failed (e.g. Social Democracy in Germany) revolutions of the twentieth century. Accordingly Marx specifically noted in the *Communist Manifesto*, that with a socialist revolution, after raising itself to 'the position of ruling class', 'the proletariat will

use its political supremacy' to make 'despotic inroads on the rights of property and on the conditions of bourgeois production', to 'centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state', that is, of 'the proletariat organised as ruling class', 'as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production'. It is important to note that Marx saw this proletarian rule as the establishment of democracy. As the *Manifesto* put it: '...the first step in the revolution of the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy'.

Viewing capitalism and communism as two distinct societies, each existing in its own right, Marx saw the emerging socialist polity as a transitional period between capitalism and communism in which classes would necessarily persist for a long time, classlessness being a feature not of socialism but of the higher stage of communism. Therefore this period will be characterised by contradictions and conflicts, by class struggle in diverse spheres as its motive force right up to the achievement of a classless and stateless society. In Marx's social theory, any government in a class society, regardless of its specific form—be it democratic or any other—is essentially a dictatorship of the ruling class over the ruled classes. And this is how he visualised the 'dictatorial' state during this transitional period. For Marx, it was to be a regime which, while dictatorial towards the old exploiting classes would be the broadest kind of democracy for the workers and the people in general, much more democratic than the most liberal of bourgeois democracies, extending to the working people all those civil rights and political freedoms through whose exercise alone they could transform themselves into new human beings capable of building a new society. It is in *this* specific context that he spoke of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. He wrote: 'Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'.

What needs to be understood is that this was a statement about the essential *social content*, the class character of public or

political power in a transitional socialist society—just as, for Marx, even the most democratically organised bourgeois state, in this sense, is yet a 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'. 'Dictatorship' here is not something opposed to democracy as the conventional view has it. Laski, for example, recognised this in his own way, when apropos this concept he wrote: '...neither for Marx nor for Engels was it an anti-thesis of democracy; for them, its anti-thesis was the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" which, as they believed, obtained in every country, even when concealed by formally democratic political institutions, so long as the ownership of the means of production remained in middle class (*sic*) hands'.

In other words, Marx's was not a statement about form of government, its institutional structure or organisation, its parties or politics, or for that matter any specific 'dictatorial' policies to be pursued. Marx had in fact warned against confusing the 'state' with the 'government machine'. As the absolute political power of the proletariat, exercised by it as a class for self-emancipation and emancipation of the people in general, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' had no implications at all of a totalitarian dictatorship of a party, group, or individual, such as it ultimately came to be in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the regimes of 'actually existing socialism'. In fact, it was visualised as so devoid of repression or domination in relation to 'the immediate producers' and the overwhelming majority of the people, that it was to be, in Engels' celebrated phrase, 'no longer a state in the proper sense of the term'; as 'a *state*', according to Marx and Engels, it was to begin to wither away as soon as it was established.

Nevertheless, 'dictatorship of the proletariat', has remained one of the most misunderstood and mispracticed concepts in Marxism. Marx never elaborated upon it, perhaps he never found it necessary to do so. In any case he never had the time to do so. As we have already noticed, his proposed work on 'the State' never came to be written and much of what he said or wrote on the state, politics, party, democracy, etc. never came to be theorised by him. But he was always deeply suspicious of state power. He opposed 'setting the state "free"... as in Russia',

and wrote: 'Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it, and even today forms of the state are more or less free to the extent that they restrict the "freedom of the state".' I don't need to enter into any detailed discussion of this subject here. For my purpose it would suffice to draw attention to one *decisive* expression of Marx's view of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in his brief comment on the Paris Commune of 1871. He regards the Parisian Communards—Marx's 'heaven-stormers'—as the pioneers of such 'dictatorship'. Marx saw the Paris Commune, despite its limitations or inadequacies and short duration, as a workers' state in action, an example of the *rule* (or 'dictatorship') of the proletariat. Describing it as a self-liberating 'working-class government', he assessed it as 'the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of Labour'. Marx noticed the extraordinary advance in *democracy* which Commune represented both as a form of government and in the measures it carried out. Commune, wrote Marx, 'supplied the Republic with the basis of really democratic institutions', though he recognised, especially in view of the brief duration of the Commune, that its measures 'could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people'.

The Commune, elected in a general election, destroyed the old military-bureaucratic bourgeois state apparatus, suppressed parliamentarism, and substituted it by people more directly governing themselves with binding mandates (*mandat impératif*) on delegates to representative bodies; it 'got rid of the standing army and the police', replacing one with people at arms and turning the other into a responsible, 'at all times revocable agent of the Commune'; it abolished bureaucracy and put in its place an elected civil service, all its officials—administrative, judicial, educational and any other—to be elected on the basis of universal suffrage and subject to recall at any time at the demand of the electorate, their salaries at par with the wages of the working people; it divested the police and clergy of their political influence, and so on. Its view of national organisation, which Commune had no time to develop, involved decentralised

democratic structures so that, in Marx's words, 'the unity of the nation was... to become a reality by the destruction of the State power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity, independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence'.

Crucially important in the measures of the Commune, which covered the Commune members themselves, was the concern for effective safeguards or barriers against corruption, place-hunting, coercion or arrogance of the state officials and their own deputies, making difficult, if not impossible, the emergence of any privileged bureaucratic elite. As if half-aware of the bureaucratic threat that could arise in the future, Marx and Engels were at great pains to underline the measures that the Commune had undertaken to guarantee a socialist revolution against the recrudescence of bureaucratic power. Even as Marx praised the Communards for their 'Revolution against the *state* itself', and welcomed the 'amputation' of the 'merely repressive organs of the old governmental power' (the army and the police) and the return of the state's 'legitimate functions' to the democratically elected and modestly compensated, responsible agents of society, he wrote: "Nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture". There was no room here for any *nomenklatura* or bureaucratic rule which became the dominant feature of government and politics in the erstwhile Soviet Union. The Parisian workers sought to make impossible *ex ante* the rise of a special caste (bureaucratic or any other) standing above and opposed to the people that was later the source of so-called 'deviations' and 'distortions' and so much else that went so grievously wrong in the Soviet Union. Severely critical of the 'statist superstition' of the German Social Democrats, it was precisely this significance of the Commune that Engels underlined when he approvingly wrote of the measures taken by it 'against transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into masters of society—an inevitable transformation in all previous states'. For Marx and Engels, the Paris Commune was and remained the model of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as they had

visualised it. Two decades after the Commune arose and was soon drowned in blood by a most ruthless bourgeois counter-revolution, in a sharp rejoinder to the rather shallow critics of their concept, Engels wrote: 'Of late, the social-democratic philistine has once more been filled with the wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.' It needs to be specifically noted that Marx not only saw the extraordinarily democratic Paris Commune as the model of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', a 'thoroughly expansive' political form for a socialist transition, but, insofar as class struggle continues throughout the *transitional* period, Marx also viewed it as affording 'the rational medium in which that class struggle can run through its different phases in the most rational and humane way.'

It will not be out of place to mention that Lenin understood 'dictatorship of the proletariat' exactly as Marx and Engels did. He argued for it in his *State and Revolution* and sought to practice it—'Soviets' being its new historical form—in the immediate aftermath of the revolution he led in Russia; though it all withered away and perished too early and too fast. The how and why of it we shall explore later. The fact to be immediately noticed is that 'dictatorship of the proletariat' soon become 'the great absence' in the historical experiment of 'building socialism' in the Soviet Union. This is what R. Khasbulatov, himself a servant become master, and a latter-day accomplice in the final decay, degeneration and collapse of the Soviet experiment, in an earlier, honest moment wrote: 'If the Soviets had really become the organs of power, if the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry had really been organised, Stalinism would never have existed... The paradox of socialism consists in the fact that the concept itself of the proletarian dictatorship was discredited without ever being applied in the USSR'. That this observation betrays rank ignorance of Lenin and the early Soviet history only shows up the kind of leadership Stalinism ultimately spawned in the Soviet Union.

X

I would like to conclude this rather scrappy account of how Marx and Engels thought about socialism, the values and ideals which, according to them, socialism embodied, with a brief discussion of an implication of this account for what was built and has now collapsed as socialism in the Soviet Union. The implication is that if such indeed was socialism as visualised in classical Marxism, such its economic and political values and ethical-aesthetic ideals, then it can be legitimately argued that what was built in the Soviet Union was not socialism; and this has raised an issue that needs to be noticed and taken care of, before I proceed with my discussion of more substantive themes.

That what was built in the Soviet Union, or later imposed or more or less copied in East Europe, was not socialism as Karl Marx or the classical Marxist tradition had visualised it, was common knowledge for a pretty long time, except in official communist circles; it had compelled even its friendly critics, willing to give it every benefit of doubt, to speak of it as only 'actually existing socialism', though 'formerly existing socialism' would be, perhaps, more appropriate now. Scholars had argued about it previously and now any number are busy pointing out that it 'ran counter to what socialism has meant to all shades of socialist thought', that it was indeed not socialism at all. We are informed that it was 'not socialism as historically understood, for example, by Marx, involving a democratically controlled economy and a state subordinate to society', that it was 'very far from socialism—a form of society where the associated producers are the masters of the process of production, a society based on the largest economic, social, and political democracy, a commonwealth liberated from all class, ethnic, and gender exploitation and oppression', that it was 'at best an authoritarian welfare state', or something 'closer to what Marx dismisses as "crude communism"', and so on.

The failure of 'actually existing socialism', really a non-socialism according to these critics, has therefore, most naturally, given rise to a response which needs to be taken note of, for it is widely shared on the Left including knowledgeable scholars and even activists, who would still defend and speak

up for socialism. It has been argued that since the 'socialism' in question had little or no relation to the real thing, the socialism of Karl Marx, but was only propagated and sought to be legitimised as such by the powers that be, the question of failure of socialism simply does not arise; to talk either of failure or 'crisis' of socialism is, strictly speaking, irrelevant. Far too many on the Left, especially Marxologists among them, have been opting for this response. We are told that 'socialism has not failed because it has not been tried', that socialism 'was not tried—or rather, socialism as the attempt by the majority to establish democratic control of economic life was not tried, only control of society by the State bureaucracy was', that 'what never even existed cannot be said to have failed', that 'one cannot die before being born', that 'Communism is not dead, it is not yet born—the same applies to socialism', that to speak of failure 'is a grotesque misrepresentation of facts, because socialism was not even started... not even the first steps were taken', that 'only what has lived can die, that socialism therefore could never die in the East', and so on. And if this response is deemed a sufficient answer to the 'enemies' of socialism who incessantly speak of its 'failure' or 'crisis', its 'friends', the 'official' communists and others, who have complained of 'dismantling' of socialism in the erstwhile Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, are told that it is not possible to dismantle something which does not exist. And that is that.

It is significant that the overwhelming majority of theoretical contributions sustaining this position have been made in the developed capitalist countries, which, however, is not to deny that such argumentation has its validity, it certainly has an empirical basis and theoretical coherence. Nevertheless, for socialists it is a very weak response. Whatever its attraction as an easily scored propaganda point for the academically inclined, it cannot be acceptable to those who take their socialism seriously or are actively involved with the movement, because of the theoretical as well as practical implications of this response. Since 'socialism' in the Soviet Union was not really socialism—an ideal still to be realised—and since it had nothing to do with genuine Marxism, the implications are that its record

or failure poses no particular problems for socialists, least of all for those of Marxist persuasion, that the collapse in the Soviet Union does not in any way compromise the socialist cause and therefore there is no need or obligation on the part of such believers in genuine socialism to undertake a rigorously critical reappraisal of this truly agonising historical experience. They only need, as so often in the past, to differentiate themselves and take their distance from this 'fraudulent' socialism and proclaim that, despite everything, real or true socialism is alive and well and as destined to triumph as ever—an argument or political position which, bypassing all the difficult demands of the objective situation and revolutionary praxis, generally ends up either constructing 'visions' of 'true socialism' and appealing in its name, or persuading people of the historical necessity, indeed inevitability, of socialism.

The validity of this argument, such as it is, does not save it from being an argument of utter political poverty. If ever there was an argument that preaches only to the already persuaded, this is it. Those who have experienced or rather suffered this 'socialism', far from getting converted now, will not find even consolation in being informed that it was not socialism at all, certainly not real socialism—they have already turned, for the time being at least, to Yeltsins and their ilk in their midst, to the magic of the capitalist market and authoritarianism of its 'democratic politics', while those in opposition would rather be damned than speak again of socialism, 'real' or any other. For others, elsewhere, this argument amounts to a self-defeating denial of a historic experiment carried out in the name of socialism, simply because it did not take place strictly according to the book. An evasion of the real and difficult issues raised by the failure of this experiment, it is a politically impotent response, and plain bad tactics for those genuinely committed to the cause of socialism. It is wholly unrealistic to believe that the damage done to the idea of socialism by what has happened in the erstwhile Soviet Union can be wished away by abstract theoretical exercises or faithful assertions on behalf of real socialism, its inevitability or invincibility.

It would simply not do for Marxists or serious socialists to disclaim any association with or responsibility either for the October Revolution or the state and socialism which issued from it. The current appellation, usage and vocabulary of socialism, as of Marxism as revolutionary theory and practice, is so deeply embedded in this historical context that the attempts to change or bypass it, to escape its contemporary historical predicament through its denial or abstract exercises in Marxism or socialism, are not only sterile, they could even be harmful to the struggle for socialism in the coming years. The October Revolution and most other revolutions which followed in *its* wake were genuine socialist revolutions with deep roots in an international movement going back to mid-nineteenth century and they were won with the support of tens of millions of people, won and defended by the heroism and sacrifice, dedication and ingenuity of millions of communist or socialist men and women the world over. Parties which led the revolutionary struggles successfully, by and large did so under the banner of Marxism and their leaders were for the most part seasoned Marxists whose mission in life was to overthrow an unjust and exploitative system and to replace it with one based on the principles of socialism as expounded by Marx and Engels and their followers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And these leaders, Lenin onwards, appealed to Marx, sought to organise support for their new regimes on the basis that they were Marxists, and at the subjective level, no matter how mistaken, believed that, in a difficult and unexpected situation, they acted in furtherance of the socialist cause as they understood it; and for the most part, at least till recently, their political credentials were accepted by a powerful, even if somewhat stagnant international movement. These leaders had every intention of creating a new social system along the lines suggested, though never elaborated, by Marx in the nineteenth century. And the concerned regimes, again under Marxist inspiration, regardless of the nature of what ultimately came to be built, were explicitly committed to building socialist societies, which was well expressed in their initial and at least some of the later achievements, in economic development as well as in matters of job security, education and

healthcare, of social security in general and a cultured life for all. Whatever their success or failure in implementing the classical Marxist or socialist programme, their effort certainly implicated, in some degree, any politics that chooses public ownership and planning as a means and popular welfare as a goal. They certainly came to provide an alternative model of development with impressive achievements to its credit and several features of great appeal to the masses of impoverished and exploited people in what has come to be described as the third world. It is through the October Revolution and the establishment of a state of the Soviets that the crucially important message of Marxism and militant revolutionary struggle reached the vast masses of these poor people in the periphery of the global capitalist system. And like so many others the world over, they identified the countries of 'actually existing socialism' as socialist and Marxist. It is as such that these countries were admired and condemned, vigorously defended and viciously attacked, for seventy odd years in case of the Soviet Union. These years had witnessed a global spread of communist movement and socialist ideas, producing organisations, parties, and individuals by their tens of millions all over the world who identified with the Soviet Union—they looked to it as supporters, as forgiving or gullible friends, as apologists—and did so as socialists or communists. Many of them supported it as Marxists, just as not a few criticised and opposed it, even died for their opposition, as Marxists (which, incidentally, means that not all Marxists and *a fortiori* not all socialists are answerable for the terrible Soviet deformation of the socialist idea). This support and opposition in the name of Marxism implicates the Marxist doctrine in what has happened in the Soviet Union in a manner that no one who cares for Marxism or socialism can afford to ignore. To deny or refuse to see all this—the authentic revolutionary socialist origins and Marxist associations of the Soviet Union, its complex and turbulent, at times heroic history in pursuit of the socialist idea, its professed aims and ambitions, the not inconsiderable initial success and some at least of later achievements, its place in the world socialist movement over these seventy odd years, etc. and the implications of it all for the future of socialism, for

the struggle for socialism that continues—is not only falsification of history, it is also bad socialist politics. However we assess it, the Soviet experience is part of our heritage as socialists. We cannot simply deny or disown it, or cast it away so easily. If it is a dream gone sour, it was yet our dream.

The assessments of course vary and the debate will continue for long. There are those, the old 'faithfuls', who till the end believed that what obtained in the Soviet Union was indeed socialism, albeit with some 'deviations' and 'distortions'. To many others it embodied, in however distorted a form, a genuine and at least partially successful effort to build a socialist society, which had a great deal to be said for it and was worth defending. As a somewhat sympathetic summing up we have Isaac Deutscher's suggestive epigram: 'Socialism in a backward country is backward socialism', though it must not be interpreted too literally. Not a few have seen it, with Stefan Heym, as 'pioneering socialism', humankind's first experiment with socialism as society of the future. That it was some kind of capitalism is a mistaken view, but there is no denying that in terms of the classical socialist tradition, it was anything but socialism. Certainly, it was not our model—no so, at least for a pretty long time. But as the argument goes on about what was built as socialism in the Soviet Union, there is no escaping the fact that its spectacularly ignominious overnight collapse will haunt any socialist project in the world for decades to come and continue to demand that we understand what has happened and come to terms with it, for our own sake and even more to be able to explain to the skeptical why and how the society we continue to struggle for will be different from the recently demised 'socialism'.

On a world historical scale, what the demise of this 'socialism' means is that the first world-wide effort to overthrow the world-system of plunder and oppression which is capitalism has not succeeded, leaving the world at the near-absolute mercy of global capitalism with its exploitation and inequities at home and abroad, its unequal exchange relations, debt-slavery and profit-maximising allocation of resources and dictation of economic policy the world over. Global capitalism, with its

massive economic and military might survives as the only international system and its victims, the people everywhere, are left without an international movement with a strategy or perspective or, for the time being it seems, even the goal of overthrowing capitalism.

This is indeed the essential meaning of the Soviet collapse in the short run. This is not to suggest, however, that there are not those among us, men and women, who would, if not question this, certainly retain their perspective, who do not think that capitalism is either inevitable or rational, or that greed is the highest organising principle for social life, who still believe that a humane, cooperative and supportive society, a superior way of life, more rational, creative and fulfilling as well as more democratic and egalitarian, is possible. Such men and women are there the world over, more numerous than many in this moment of defeat and despair think—and their numbers will only grow with the passage of time. Significant anti-capitalist movements still exist the world over, many of them influenced by the communist tradition. And soon there will be many more. People in the advanced West, no longer distracted by 'the ugly face' of Soviet-style socialism, may see better, now, the ugly face of capitalism that is becoming daily more viciously visible and yet turn to socialism as Karl Marx had visualised. The working masses in the erstwhile 'socialist' East, in their progress from 'bull-shit Marxism' of Brezhnev and Gorbachev to 'bull-shit liberalism' of Gorbachev and Yeltsin and their successors, through their own troubles and turmoils, may yet learn to struggle for their real interests, for a socially just and democratic society born as much of their historical experience as the teachings of Karl Marx. And in the years and decades to come, as in the past, the world historical revolutionary process may well continue to proceed via the poor and oppressed of the third world, for the same reasons as before, though against heavier odds; and as these people confront the choice 'socialism or peripheralisation', they may yet again seek and find inspiration, guidance and sustenance for their struggles in the doctrine of Karl Marx. The struggle against capitalism and for a just and egalitarian social order is far from over.

Surely it does not help to be told that the October Revolution was premature, or that it was no socialist revolution, or that the socialism just demised was just a non-socialism and no more. Nor should critical reflection content itself with simply denouncing its evident denial of democracy, bureaucratic degeneration and loss of ideals, or with the making of better visions of the socialism of the future. It will also not do to explain the failure in the Soviet Union as the fault of evil men, blaming it all on Stalin in the first place and secondarily on a corrupted *nomenklatura*, with due roles assigned to Khrushchevs, Brezhnevs and Gorbachevs of the Soviet Communist Party. And certainly it is neither desirable nor possible to pass by the experience of 'historical communism', as it has been called, as something without significance to those who would today seek to construct a socialist alternative to capitalism. What is needed is a properly serious Marxist analysis of what went wrong; its absence can only harm the socialist cause—not only will the much-needed lessons remain unlearned, the interpretations of the enemies of socialism will go uncontested and gain acceptability. In fact, the socialist left will have no credibility unless it comes to terms with what has happened, with honesty and clarity, and above all, courage this demands. It has to be a ruthlessly critical analysis of why socialist revolutions of our times have ended the way they have, in new forms of class society, or a 'socialism' that has collapsed so ignominiously, an analysis which does not avoid difficult or painful issues by idealistically defining them out of socialism.

There has to be an honest appraisal not only of errors, which generally do have a certain qualified admissibility, but also crimes committed in the name of socialism, which can never be condoned. The distinction is important. Errors, it has been pointed out, 'are misjudgements in the service of our agreed-upon program, unnecessary compromises or pompous refusals to compromise, faulty estimates of our progress and the enemy's weakness, passive acceptance of capitalist ways of doing things in the hope that they could be domesticated to socialist ends'. Crimes, on the other hand, 'are violations of socialist democracy, socialist legality, revolutionary

humaneness, and that fierce honesty which is basic to the commitment to liberate and mobilise the collective intelligence of all the oppressed. Crimes are the debasement of Marxism to apologetics, the use of force to settle disagreements within the revolution, the covering up of corruption'. There is, of course, truth in the claim that the criminal episodes of Soviet history are not socialism but distortions of socialism. But it is well to remember that not socialism but *distortions* of socialism, they are yet distortions of socialism, which compels us to think of what in our theory and practice made socialism vulnerable to crimes.

Only a bold confrontation with history in Marxist fashion, a willingness to 'think as Marx would have thought in (our) place' can enable us to make fresh beginnings in our struggle and be equal to the tasks of the day: to defend the gains of more than 150 years' struggle for socialism, acknowledge the reality of the current defeat in a responsible, self-critical manner, evaluate the reasons for it, draw the necessary lessons and regroup and prepare for the next wave of revolutionary upsurge, which may be sooner than most people, friends and foes of socialism, think. It is an agenda for years and even decades and yet an agenda for here and now.

Chapter 4

On the 50th Anniversary of India's Independence— A Marxist Argument*

To borrow from Tom Paine's metaphoric rejoinder to Burke's attack on the French Revolution, admiration for the 'plumage' of India's 'national development' should not prevent us from seeing its failure in 'the dying bird'. The world indeed looks very different from below, when the poor and oppressed of 'our nation' look at it.

The most important fact of modern times, over the past few centuries, is the 'meta-narrative' of capitalism which is still on, more dominant globally than ever before, and more lethal too, for it is now a capitalism living beyond its historical time, its creative achievements all behind it and only destructive potentialities ahead, a threat looming large over the future of humankind, reminding us of what Marx foresaw and Rosa Luxemburg later formulated as the prophetic poser: 'socialism or barbarism'. The structural logic of capitalism, the law-like tendencies of its capital-accumulative process, which Marx explicated, have meant uneven and unequal development

* *Mainstream*, November 1, 1997. Based on the author's *Five Lectures in Marxist Mode*.

within and across countries, generating wealth and affluence at one end and poverty and deprivation at the other (even when, under certain temporarily favourable circumstances, this is somewhat curbed in the advanced centres of capitalism). Worldwide, the inexorable consequence has been a gap between the centre and the periphery of global capitalism, an ever-widening gap between wealth and poverty at the two poles. Hence a worldwide struggle against capitalism, which in the periphery meant a struggle to get out of this global system in order to be at all able to build a better life for the common people.



A major breakthrough in this struggle occurred (as anticipated by Marx and Engels) in the aftermath of the First World War—an Europewide revolution, triggered off by the Russian Revolution. But of this only the revolution in Russia survived—elsewhere it was let down by social democracy and strangled by capitalist counter-revolution—leaving Lenin and the Bolsheviks confronting a totally unanticipated situation, and a problem: what does their poor and backward country do in the midst of global domination of capitalism? History had played a trick on the doctrine of Karl Marx: instead of socialism being built on a base provided by the economic, political and cultural achievements of capitalism, a backward country was called upon to build it. Lenin saw this as a struggle where 'defeat' was a distinct possibility, and wrote: 'struggle, and struggle alone, decides ... how far we shall advance'. But the struggle, particularly after Lenin's early departure, was not adequate enough. A deeply deformed socialism was built and now, seventy years later, a finally defeated Russia has been sucked back into global capitalism. What has happened was not inevitable. But the fact remains that we are now left with the 'experience (that) will benefit other revolutions', the least that Lenin had hoped for in the event of defeat, and the still unsettled question: what does a backward or a relatively backward country like ours do to advance the interests of its people in a situation of global domination of capitalism?



Modern India and its struggle for freedom is a 'meta-narrative' within the global meta-narrative of capitalism. Before 1947, we were part of a global system well-integrated into a world market economy. We were globalised, but we did not like it. Our globalisation then also had a name, imperialism, and we struggled against it, precisely because it meant—by virtue of its structural logic—accumulation of wealth in England and poverty in India. Like other third world countries, we wanted to get out of this globalisation to be able to opt for an independent, self-reliant development in the interests of our common people. Herein lay the essential meaning of our long struggle for freedom.



We won our freedom in 1947. To understand what really happened in this historic event, it helps to think of what did not happen at the time. There was no revolutionary overthrow of the British imperialist rule in India, no accompanying economic or social or even political revolution. The Gandhi-bourgeois-led freedom struggle (a defensible and better description than any other) ended in a compromise and settlement with imperialism which transferred political power from the foreign rulers to the Indian rulers, leaving the old socio-economic and state-bureaucratic structures largely intact which, in turn, with all their structural compulsions, became the basis for the post-colonial 'national development'. This development has carried the full impress of the way freedom was finally 'won' in 1947.



The post-colonial rulers in India, having gained power in the state, went on to set up a 'national project' of self-reliant economic development to supplement the recently won political freedom with the more important economic freedom for the Indian people. The Soviet Union was seen as an example of successful state intervention in the economy (which the Indian bourgeoisie itself deemed necessary), the Cold War allowed the new rulers a certain manoeuvrability of action, and Nehru's 'socialistic pattern of society' soon provided the necessary ideological underpinning for the post-colonial process of national reconstruction, with its focus on the state sector to build

up the economy, affirmative action for the most disadvantaged sections of society and economic growth in general which was to benefit the people at large. The project was not lacking in vision and it soon had significant achievements to its credit. But despite Nehru's awareness of the 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order', this project was no radical break with 'the existing order', vindicating Marx who had, in his analysis of the failed German revolution of 1848, already said that henceforth the bourgeoisie could not be relied upon to make success of even a bourgeois democratic revolution.



The Nehru era was the golden age of India's national project, though it was never without its critics. The slogan was 'growth with equity and distributive justice'. Acting as 'the executor of the economic necessities of the national situation', in Engels' words, the Indian state indeed ensured growth in the economy but the hope for equity and distributive justice to people was largely belied. The years that followed revealed the inherent limitations of the Nehruvian national project and saw its rapid disintegration. The structural logic of 'the existing order' prevailing, the economy was soon 'some strange kind of corrupted capitalist growth', as Romesh Thapar saw it, or 'a type of capitalist development in the interests of a narrow section of Indian society', as V.K.R.V. Rao put it. As it finally came up, it could be more firmly described as a state-supported India-specific capitalism which reminded one of Marx's observation about countries which

suffer not only from the development of capitalist production but also from the incompleteness of that development. Alongside of modern evils a whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms. We suffer not only from the living but from the dead.

As capitalism, its structural logic meant unequal and uneven development in the country as a whole—the near-universally recognised 'two nations' (the rich and the poor) and 'internal colonialism' (in relation to the country's more backward parts). As for its specificity, this is how I put it sometime back:

Its historical specificity has given it a strong comprador and lumpen character, presided over as it is by a bourgeoisie born old without ever having known youth, with none of the possible virtues of youth and all the vices of old age. Here all the exploitative and oppressive evils of belated capitalist development, semi-feudalism, bureaucratically-corrupt public sector and bloated bourgeois politics daily enter into and reinforce each other. All pervasive black money, flourishing as a parallel economy, only intensifies the structural biases of a white money of scams and swindles, even as it serves to sustain, with help from politicians, policemen and sundry state functionaries, an essentially illegal, secular or communal, *mafiosi-led* parallel political polity, which has today come to acquire an almost legitimised coexistence with the formally legal state in large, especially urban, parts of the country. A long time ago, apropos the essentially *secondary* character of such capitalist development, Karl Marx had written: 'as is well known, secondary diseases are more difficult to cure and, at the same time, ravage the body more than original ones.'

Outside of economy, it was soon a case of the 'state as private property', and any kind of power in the state a means of 'rapid private accumulation'; on official admission, even of the funds directly allocated for poverty alleviation, only 'the leakage', a bare fifteen per cent, reached the people—the state in India far from being a part of any solution, itself became a part of almost every problem. Democracy, fought for and won by the people, still valuable to them, and throughout defended by them against subversion from above, yet only vindicated Bagehot's classic observation about its being 'the way to give the people the greatest illusion of power while allowing them the smallest amount in reality', even as it also served to legitimise the ruling class domination in society. 'Democratic politics' itself, once practised as 'Hindu Undivided Family', as economic problems surfaced, steadily degenerated into an utterly unscrupulous, no-holds-barred infighting among the beneficiaries of the system for power and pelf in the state, where, as they violated the rules of their own game, it was now truly the end justifying the means, literally any means; it was Malraux's 'politicians' politics' in its worst sense.

The national project was fast ending up as a class project but not recognised as such. It had its beneficiaries, and there

was a consensus of the arrived and the complacent about it. Nationalism too had its uses, the emerging reality could be obscured in its name. Such was the domination of the ruling class ideas that even those who saw capitalism, saw its more as our very own 'national economy', and, together with faith and force of habit, this ensured the prevalence of the view that the 'national project' was still on. But the project was already faltering. In any case there was nothing much in its achievements for the vast masses of the common Indian people. To borrow from Tom Paine's metaphoric rejoinder to Burke's attack on the French Revolution, the 'plumage' of India's 'national development' was yet that of a 'dying bird'. The world looked very different from below, when the poor and oppressed of 'our nation' looked at it. However, the definitive collapse of the national project was still in the future.



Mid-1960s onwards, the post-colonial national project in India floundered and fast degenerated, its economic crises underpinning and moving in step with the crises of the political system, 'democratic politics' and all that. If India's 'national economy' generated any number of potentially explosive issues, its 'national politics' regularly turned these issues into problems, problems into running sores and these sores into tragedies for the Indian people, in Punjab, Kashmir, almost everywhere. By the end of the 1980s the national project was virtually over. Soon enough a dead-end economic crisis or financial bankruptcy of sorts, produced by the previously pursued policies, coincided with the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War and its eventual disintegration, depriving the Indian ruling classes of whatever little manoeuvrability they still had and leaving them more vulnerable than ever before to the offensive of a recharged global capitalism. Given the strong comprador or lumpen strain inherent in their character, led by their major political formation, the Congress-I, with their other political formations in tow, they succumbed, and hiccups and protests over 'level playing field' notwithstanding, opted for what is turning out to be a junior partnership within the global capitalist system. As beneficiaries of growth during the Nehru era and afterwards, and now with

a substantial economic strength of their own, 'globalisation' also provides them with new avenues of profit making at home and abroad. Therefore, this 'succumbing' can also be seen as a natural progress for Indian capitalism. India was again globalised, this time through a largely voluntary submission of the Indian rulers. The national project finally and definitively collapsed in 1991.



The evidence of this collapse is there in the disintegration of values and degradation of life all around us, in the continuing poverty of our people and growing consumerism of the elites and a society at once cynical and fearful about the future. It is there in official statistics and pages of the private media and so-called 'national mainstream' which, bearing the impress of India's corrupt and corrupting, somewhat lumpen capitalist development, is an increasingly dirty affair—corrupt, communal and criminalised, a repressively homogenising mainstream. The evidence is there in the visionless and so obviously laboured efforts of the powers that be to flog a tired and flabby patriotism into some semblance of life in this fiftieth year of India's independence, including Colgate-sponsored selling of *Vande Matarams* on the television by hordes of India's VIPs and VVIPs. And this evidence is pathetically present in the impotence (or is it hypocrisy?) of the supposedly 'stirring' calls being made on the occasion—in Parliament for a 'second freedom struggle' and by the Prime Minister to 'begin the struggle for economic freedom'! One wonders what these past fifty years have been about. A Finance Minister took India back into globalisation, asking us not to be afraid of the East India Company, opened up India to the multinationals, on the dishonest plea that 'the nation has been living beyond its means'—'nation' indeed, when a good majority of our people have simply no means to live and most others none to indulge any 'living beyond'! His successor, more honest and ideologically committed, has been publicly pleading with the former globalisers in London to come back to India for another equally long stay (and then gone to town with this pleading in Washington and elsewhere): 'You came to India and stayed for

200 years. Now come prepared to invest and stay for another 200 years, and there will be huge rewards'. The post-colonial national project is indeed over and done with.



Capitalism is today so powerful and pervasive as to have become invisible, and it is all the more powerful for being invisible. You no longer mention or recognise it. It is there, but without a name as it were, a harmless, nay benevolent, phenomenon called 'globalisation', recently arrived on the world scene to help the poor and backward countries out of their problems. Globalisation, nevertheless, has a proper name, capitalism, its world economy or market is a capitalist world economy or market. Harvard economist Robert Reich's phrase 'secession of the successful', is vividly expressive of a crucial feature of any capitalist market society. Globalisation of India means that the 'successful' of Indian society, the ruling elites of India, have decided to 'secede' from the common Indian people. A capitalist market society is also a case of 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not', as a President of Brazil once reported it in Washington. Therefore, the Indian economy may do 'fine' (with its growth rates, etc.) but, given its structural logic, the Indian people will not; for them the consequences of the current globalisation are not likely to be much different from those of the globalisation they had struggled hard and long to finally escape in 1947. Their peripheralisation this time could well be much worse.



The ruling classes of India have, through their different political formations, decided to 'secede' from the people and opted for 'globalisation' as their strategic option for the future. The Indian people yet again face the question, whose full implications were somewhat obscured in 1947 due largely to the interim successes of the Soviet Union: what do they do in the current situation of global domination of capitalism? The historical experience in India and elsewhere in the third world makes it abundantly clear that they will find no answers in capitalism, national (including the one now, in effect, sought by the RSS and its *Swadeshi Jagran Manch*) or globalised. The choice for them

remains socialism or peripheralisation. This is not to posit socialism as achievable today or tomorrow, or even the day-after for that matter, but to posit it as an alternative strategic goal, as the principle governing people's politics which links together their immediate, ongoing and emerging struggles in an ultimate project of revolutionary transformation of our society, as the goal of a long transitional process, whose specifics and speed will depend upon the objective material conditions and the nature and balance of the class forces involved at each stage of the struggle for the ultimate objective. Immediately, it means saying 'no' to globalisation. This is not to argue for any kind of 'autarky' in economic development but to pose the issue of whether this development will be governed by *external* imperatives, those issuing from the requirements of the world capitalist market (export-led growth, etc.) and the associated consumerism of the rich, or primarily by *internal* imperatives, those flowing from an assessment of our own resources and the needs of our common people.

The issue, in other words, is that of priorities: development for what and whom? Is it to satisfy the basic needs of the people or the consumerism of the elite in our society? The argument is for a pro-people socialism-oriented autonomous development which draws on our own strengths, our domestic resources and capacities, including those of the hard-working poor who still remain the most creative and productive in our society, a development which gives the common people, in both urban and rural areas, a positive stake in the economy and mobilises them for building a better society and, let me add, for the inevitable struggle against global imperialism and its local allies or partners. This has to be the alternative strategic option of the Indian people.



Technological backwardness is often pressed as an argument to counter the plea for such autonomous economic development in a third world country. Here, apart from the fact that in India at least we are not that lacking in either technology or the talent for it, we need to overcome the widely prevalent fetishism of science and technology, which at times (as, for example, with

Nehru and his 'temples of modern India', etc.) has even gone to the extent of expecting them to do the job of a social revolution, which they simply cannot. As with economics so with technology, the question again is one of priorities: technology for what purpose? Once this question is asked, the argument for getting access to the most modern Western technology, via globalisation—even if that was certain which it certainly is not—loses much of its force. If the purpose is to satisfy the consumerist hunger of the privileged part of our population with the most modern gadgets and designs, and the goodies of the West, then rushing into globalisation indeed makes some sense. But if the purpose or priority is to meet the needs of all the people for decent food, clothing and shelter, clean water, proper sanitation and health protection, education and cultural opportunities, and the like, then devoting scarce resources to the most modern technology is simply wasteful, because there is little in the latest technology of the West that could make a significant contribution. In fact what is most useful and relevant in technology, Western or otherwise, for improving the way of life of the masses, is widely known; moreover, most of it is already available at home and what else is needed, is obtainable in the normal course of managed trade.



A socialism-oriented autonomous economic development as a strategic option for our people is premised on *politics* (that is *people's politics*) and not '*the market*' commanding the economy (which, however, does not rule out an useful role for the market). If such development is necessary in the interests of our people and they have no choice but to attempt it if they would avoid peripheralisation, with the people *really in power* it is also possible. The failure of the world's first experiment in socialism notwithstanding, there is much in the socialist experience of our time to help guide this attempt and be hopeful about it: for example, in the still unparalleled achievements of the early years of the post-revolutionary societies in Russia and elsewhere despite their economic backwardness, in Cuba's struggle to build socialism and save the gains of its socialist revolution, in Lenin's socialist project during the few years that he survived

the October Revolution, in the experience of the 'Mao years' in China, and so on. An uncharted territory, we can still enter it with confidence.



The crux of the matter is *people's power in the state*, their 'political supremacy' in society, as Marx put it. Not phoney 'empowerment' from above, but people fighting and winning power for themselves through their own struggles is central to securing a pro-people economic development in the country. 'National politics' of the day is almost exhausted so far as promotion of people's interests is concerned, it is today virtually parasitic on these interests. The traditional or mainstream left, content all these years to operate only on the terrain of bourgeois politics, has finally lost out to it, and does not seem likely to recover its original commitment to revolutionary politics or socialism. But life continues to stir on the ground, the terrain where the real struggle for people's power begins—some old radical initiatives persist and many new ones are emerging everywhere, involving women, dalits, tribals, minor nationalities, ethnic or religious minorities, human rights, ecological concerns, etc; any number of popular struggles at local levels are on. They all face serious problems of theory and practice. The people will surely have to go through the hard and painful school of experience, and survive the all too many wrong battles they are misled into fighting, before they learn to fight the right battles of their own. But learn they will. Globalisation itself, as it proceeds apace, will clarify as nothing else could, the real issues of Indian economy and politics—the issues of class divisions and exploitation, of the rich and the poor within the nation—and thus help people see through the ruling class politics of different varieties and come to a politics of their own, articulate their diverse struggles with a class-based people's politics, at both local and national levels, and confront the strategic option of the ruling classes, globalisation, with their own strategic option of a socialism-oriented autonomous economic development in the country. They will need to do so, the alternative is only their further peripheralisation within the global capitalist system.



The post-colonial national project may have collapsed, and, in terms of their objective interests, the paths of the ruling elite and the people may have diverged as never before, but nationalism yet remains a very strong sentiment among our people. Many of those who would agree with me may still regard the struggle for a socialism-oriented autonomous economic development as a national struggle, a continuation, as it were, of the Indian people's earlier national struggle for freedom. Contributing to the confusion here is the increasing use or popularity of the concept 'national popular', in academic and political circles on the left. This calls for a brief comment and clarification.

Nationalism, however 'ambiguous' an identity, and undoubtedly a powerful social, political and ideological force in our times, is yet a historical phenomenon with class and society-specific character, potentialities and limitations, and, therefore, capable of manifesting itself in diverse forms. Located as we are in the third world and with the still alive, though much faded, memories of our long struggle for freedom, we in this country are conventionally inclined to see nationalism as a liberationist force or ideology. But this is not always or necessarily the case with nationalism. With the ruling classes in the normal pursuit of their interests, or when faced with situations of crisis, nationalism has often taken all sorts of anti-people, imperialist or statist or racist or fascist forms, providing ideological support to ruling class politics, their political domination at home and abroad. In our own country, more particularly in recent decades, nationalism has been used by our post-colonial rulers to cover up or find alibis for their defaults, to conceal the social reality of our much-divided and exploitative society, to divert people away from their real concerns and mobilise them behind ruling class politics. One political formation of the ruling classes has even come up with a Hindu-chauvinist nationalism, 'cultural nationalism' as they call it, to gain popular support and in the name of *swadeshi* better defend and promote the interests of India's 'national' capitalism.

Nationalism in India before 1947 was indeed progressive;

under a different, more advanced class leadership and programme, it could have been radical, even revolutionary. It was progressive because it aimed at resolving the basic structural contradictions of Indian society, congealed in imperialism, whose resolution alone could clear the path for Indian people's struggle for a better life. The struggle to resolve these contradictions, against imperialism, was our national struggle for freedom. But after 1947, with the post-colonial rulers having facilitated a historically specific form of capitalist development in the country, the basic contradictions that now need to be resolved to clear the path for Indian people's continuing struggle for a better life lie *within* the nation, and their resolution is a matter of struggle within, against the Indian ruling classes; therefore, strictly speaking, this struggle cannot be viewed simply as a national struggle. In fact, Indian people's continuing struggle against imperialism, globalisation's neo-colonialism, too is now a part of this new struggle within, and not a continuation of the old pre-1947 anti-imperialist struggle, because the neo-colonialist 'integration', rather enhanced integration of India into the global capitalist economy, is now occurring by the grace of, through the opportunities provided by, indeed at the invitation of, the new rulers at Delhi. Nationalism or a national perspective only obscures this most basic of all issues facing the Indian people.

Thus, the struggle for a people's strategic option as against 'globalisation' that the Indian ruling classes have opted for, the struggle for a socialism-oriented autonomous development—which alone can also be an ecologically sustainable development as against a globalised Indian capitalism, subject to the capital-accumulative or profit-making imperatives of the market—is not a national struggle as such, nor a continuation of the earlier national struggle in India, though it can and may be seen as its transcendence in a strictly dialectical sense, that is, a struggle that carries forward the best traditions and hopes of the earlier liberationist struggles of the Indian people. It is in its basic character a class struggle in the proper Marxian sense which eschews its narrow economic or reductionist interpretations. No doubt a great deal of tactical resilience is necessary in relating

it, theoretically as well as practically, to the obviously important question of nationalism. But even if this struggle is viewed as a national or 'national-popular' struggle of the Indian people, it cannot but be fighting the 'anti-nation within the nation', as the Latin-Americans have learnt to call it, or 'rescuing the nation' from its ruling classes, or, as Marx would have put it, the people 'establishing itself as *the* nation', and thus remains, in its essential content, a class struggle; it cannot be a collective struggle of all Indians for a common goal, for the goals within have sharply diverged. The national task, recovering India for its people, is now, as it were, also a class task of the Indian people. Such has to be the perspective of the Indian people's struggle against globalisation and for a better life today.

Chapter 5

'The Return of Karl Marx'*

It is kind of the Foundation for Social Responsibility to have invited me for this talk in their series on 'Creeds for the New Millennium'. It would have been a grievous mistake if, in deference to current fashion, they had left Marx out of this series. But I have accepted the invitation with much diffidence. I am no scholar of Marxism. The years when one gets started on scholarship of any kind, I, like many others of my generation, had left home and studies to chase a different dream in the freedom struggle and the communist movement—the dream of a social revolution which, I believe, still needs to be made in our country. I did, then and later, pick up some Marxism and have found it useful to me in my profession as a teacher and in living my life, but I have always remained aware of my inadequacy to speak on the subject of Marxism. Part of diffidence is also due to the venue—India International Centre, its overall ambience, the atmosphere heavy with the smugness and sanity of its 'Saturday Club' and 'opinion makers'... How does one speak here of the lifelong insanity that was Karl Marx calling for 'revolution, the conversion of all hearts and the raising of all hands in behalf of the honour of the free man'? The most important reason for my diffidence, however, is the nature of the subject itself.

* A Talk, *Mainstream*, May 5, 2001.

Way back in the seventeenth century, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes had pointed to the rulers' hostility to truth—even geometrical axioms—if it ran counter to their interests. In his characteristically pungent manner, he had written: 'For I doubt not, but if it had been a thing contrary to any man's right of dominion, or to the interest of men that have dominion, *that the three angles of a triangle, should be equal to two angles of a square*, that doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of geometry, suppressed, as far as he whom it concerned was able'. (That is how the burning and banning of books—and suppression of truth—has been such an important part of our civilisational progress and seems to have got a new lease of life under the present dispensation in our country). Now, Marx's truth has obviously been 'a thing contrary to the interest of men that have dominion' in our societies. Therefore he has never lacked enemies who have been busy 'refuting', misrepresenting and vulgarising him over the last hundred years and more. But Marx has suffered equally, perhaps more, at the hands of friends—they have brought much grist to mills of the enemies through their dogmatism, scientism, economism and much else besides. In his moving short poem *Karl Heinrich Marx*, the German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger has written:

*I see you betrayed
by your disciples
only your enemies
remained what they were.*

Between enemies and friends a whole range of Marx's ideas—on philosophy and history, economics and politics, ethics and culture—has come to be distorted and vulgarised. Two of the easiest examples that immediately come to mind are what Marx is supposed to have said regarding religion and 'opium' or 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. 'If people could only *read*', Marx used to say. Maurice Dobb, the eminent Marxist economist who was also a good Marxist, had once suggested that it is much easier to say what Marxism is not than to state what it is. The collapse of the Soviet Union, of what they had built there in the

name of Marxism, has made the situation worse confounded, adding to the already formidable difficulties of speaking on the subject of Marxism.



I am not here going to chase any controversies or attempt any kind of comprehensive treatment of Marxism as I understand it. Constraints of time alone make that impossible. Mine will be a modest response to the theme of this series and I will try to make it relevant to what is happening around us in the world at large and in our country. I will advance a few basic propositions but will not be able to either offer explanations, or make qualifications, which is always necessary in social scientific thinking to secure better validity for one's propositions. I will raise more questions than provide answers. The aim is to share with you a general sense of what Marx was after and the hope is that at least some among the younger people present here learn to ask the right kind of questions of the reality around them, for in the final analysis this is indeed what Marxism of Marx is about.

I am sure many of you are intrigued by the title I have given to my talk—'The Return of Karl Marx'. Let me assure you that there is more to it than 'good old dogmatism', or 'at best, misplaced optimism' as even some 'friends', now hopeless about me, have suspected. Towards the end of 1980s, as the communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, the *New Yorker*, an upmarket magazine in the United States, celebrated the occasion with an article by Robert Heilbroner entitled 'Triumph of Capitalism', whose argument reverberated worldwide, setting off a new round of hosannas for capitalism and renewed pronouncements of 'the death of Marxism'. The argument was seriously flawed but that is not my concern at the moment. The immediately important fact is that less than a decade later, towards the end of 1997, in a bout of futurology, bringing together a series of articles around the theme 'what's next?', the same *New Yorker* went looking for the 'next most influential thinker', and the article written by John Cassidy who is no Marxist, now or ever before, was titled 'The Return of Karl Marx'! (Cassidy felt persuaded to write the article when a friend, having reached the highest positions in the US corporate world

told him that it was just as Marx had seen it). The article had concluded: 'His (Marx's) books will be worth reading as long as capitalism endures'. Cassidy is right. I will only underline that none, before or after him has studied and analysed capitalism better than Marx and that he has indeed been prophetic in his analysis of capitalism. Hence his continuing relevance for our time and the need for us to turn or return to Marx for a viable creed for the new millennium.



Marx is relevant because we are living, nationally and globally, in a world of capitalism. Of course, capitalism today is not as Marx saw and studied it in the nineteenth century. It has undergone changes, important changes, since then, and it is necessary to recognise them for understanding, and struggling against, contemporary capitalism. But as Raymond Williams once warned, in taking note of what has changed in capitalism, we must not make the mistake of underestimating everything that has not changed. And this 'everything', above all, includes the structural logic of capitalism, the law-like tendencies of its capital-accumulative process which, as Marx explicated, have meant unequal and uneven development within and across countries. Within countries, even when somewhat curbed in the advanced centres of capitalism—which curbing however remains reversible as the current dismantling of the 'welfare state' in the West shows—these tendencies have had the consequence of generating wealth and affluence at one end and poverty and deprivation at the other. Worldwide, the inexorable consequence has been a gap between the centre and the periphery of global capitalism, an ever-widening gap between wealth and poverty at the two poles. This exploitative structural logic of capitalism is as much at work today as it was when Marx first studied and analysed capitalism. In fact it is all the more at work now as, with globalisation, the world is more capitalist today than it has been for a long time—a reality that bourgeois ideology seeks to obscure through its myth-making over 'globalisation'.

In tandem with the somewhat waning 'Post-', 'Globalisation' is the fashionable buzzword these days. It is as

if something is happening that has never happened before. As if a whole new epoch of benevolence and prosperity for all has opened in human history, an epoch in which things like capitalism, imperialism, exploitation, and therefore socialism, are all a matter of the past. And there is supposed to be no alternative to what is happening as 'globalisation'. But all this is only ideological mystification, so much 'globaloney', as it has been called. Capitalism has been from the very beginning a globalising system. Adam Smith knew it and you will find its sharpest, and literally prophetic, expression in the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx wrote of how 'the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe', how it 'must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere', how it has 'established the world market' and 'through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country', how it 'batters down all Chinese walls' and 'compels all nations to adopt the bourgeois mode of production, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves', and so on. 'Globalisation', thus, is nothing new, no new epoch in the history of humankind. It is only another phase in the process of capitalist expansion, of course with its own more or less important specificities.



The most important specificity to be noticed about the current phase of globalisation is its radical departure from the way capitalism existed during the previous period of post-war boom, the 'golden age' of capitalism. Capitalism of this period was marked by Keynesian strategies of moderate macro-economic regulations and the accompanying limits on capital's unending thirst for more profits, collectively known as the 'welfare state', which, incidentally, saved capitalism from its own self-destructive tendencies—as manifested, for example, in the Great Depression—and also helped it acquire a much-needed 'human face', against the internal and external threat of socialism. The onset of a structural crisis of capitalism, which gives every sign of being irreversible, has changed all that. The 1970s saw the world economy going into a downturn that has worsened

through every recession since; the gap between business cycles is getting smaller, barely does recovery begin, the growth falters. 'Globalisation', with its neo-liberalism, is essentially a response to this structural crisis of capitalism and signifies a return, as it were, from an atypical to typical capitalism, from the aberration that was the post-war 'golden age', to a period of normal, 'free-market' capitalism. For capital to remain 'competitive' in the global market, Keynesian state interventions in the economy have to go. Nor can capitalism now afford to wear a 'human face'; with the threat of socialism having receded, perhaps, it also does not need to wear it any more. State must revert to its traditional way of serving capitalism, that is, it must now act as the main agent of globalisation. And this is indeed how state is now acting. It is ironic that at a time when the world is behaving, so to speak, in a most Marxian manner, all sorts of wise men have taken to proclaiming the obsolescence of Marxism. Far from being obsolete, Marxism has become all the more relevant today for those in search of a viable creed for our time.



Strictly speaking, Marxism is not a creed, 'a system of beliefs', as the term is conventionally understood or defined. Though, friends and enemies have tended to treat it like one; Marxists themselves have ever so often behaved like 'believers' and it was virtually reduced to a state-religion in the erstwhile Soviet Union. No creed-maker or builder of a philosophical system, Marx was, by vocation, a revolutionary as Engels emphasised in his famous grave-side speech on the death of Marx. Philosopher, economist, historian, and much else, Marx was indeed 'the man of science', said Engels. He had, however, immediately added: 'But this was not even half the man.... For Marx was before all else a revolutionist'. This was a choice Marx had made quite early in his life. In an essay Marx wrote for his school-leaving examination in 1835, 'A Young Man's Reflections on the Choice of a Career', he stated that working 'only for himself' one 'can become a famous scholar, a great sage, an excellent imaginative writer (*Dichter*), but never a perfected, a truly great man'. Instead Marx himself opted for a life 'that is most consonant with our dignity, one that is based on ideas of

whose truth we are wholly convinced, one that offers us largest scope in working for humanity'. This option, which soon turned into a clearly defined revolutionary commitment, stayed with Marx throughout his life. Early in his youth, asserting that 'man is the highest being for man', he spoke up for 'the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, despised and rejected being'; later, about the time he finished writing *Capital*, to complete which he had sacrificed, as he said, his 'health, happiness and family', Marx wrote to a friend: 'I laugh at the so-called "practical" men with their wisdom. If one chose to be an ox, one could turn one's back on the sufferings of mankind and look after one's own skin'. It is this revolutionary commitment, the moral choice he had made to stand up for 'humanity' or 'mankind' that underlay Marx's theoretical work, and the outcome was no creed for the faithful to believe in and uphold, or a closed system of philosophy already in possession of 'the truth', as the enemies have often caricatured it.

In a statement remarkable for his age, the Darwinian age drunk on its achievements of science, or 'reason' as they also called it, and breaking sharply with the received philosophical tradition, from Plato to Hegel—which, in Marx's words, again and again sought 'to settle all problems for all time' and regularly demanded 'Here is the truth! Here you must kneel'—Marx (together with Engels) proclaimed: 'we are but little beyond the beginning of human history, and the generations which will put *us* right are likely to be far more numerous than those whose knowledge we—often enough with a considerable degree of contempt—are in a position to correct ... the stage of knowledge which we have now reached is as little final as all that have preceded it'. '*De Omnibus Dubitandum*' ('Doubt Everything') was Marx's favourite methodological principle, and it is significant that so many of his writings, including *Capital*, had the word 'critique' in their titles. And it is precisely this critical spirit underlying Marxism of Karl Marx that was later expressed in Engels' adjuration to followers to 'not pick quotations from Marx or from him as if from sacred texts, but think as Marx would have thought in their place'. He had

insisted that 'it was only in that sense that the word *Marxist* had any *raison d'être*'. That is how what Marx has left behind is no creed, no 'system of beliefs' for the faithfuls to uphold and proclaim, but, most importantly, a method of thinking, a *critique* of capitalism, the unjust and inhuman society he wanted overthrown, and the vision of a just and truly humane society beyond capitalism born of this critique—a society which capitalism has not and, because of its structural logic, cannot achieve. It is this legacy of Marx which is today central to the making of a viable 'creed'—if we must use the word—for the new millennium.



Not a creed, Marx did have a vision—'traum' as he called it—of a good society for our times. Marx recognised 'free conscious activity' as 'man's species being' and had a rare awareness of the range of possibilities inhering in human nature which we cannot even imagine today because of the way capitalism has blighted our essential humanity and distorted our vision. He looked forward, beyond capitalism, to a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all', where all are fulfilled by equality and freedom, and a truly rich human life. But Marx's vision was not the usual compendium of high ideals, a string of 'oughts' divorced from 'is', making demands upon the individuals to live up to abstracted values and add up to constitute a good society. Marx rejected idealist utopianism, the making of the blueprints of an ideal society. He refused, as he said, to 'compose music of the future'. Unlike most other visions, Marx's vision was grounded in the objective reality, in the conditions then coming into existence which were for the first time making it possible for humankind to move beyond the inevitably exploitation-based, scarcity-ridden class civilisations of the past, to move beyond its 'pre-history', as Marx called it, to history proper of humankind. Marx saw these conditions as created by capitalism. In his famous tribute to capitalism's extraordinary productive achievements in the *Communist Manifesto*, he wrote: 'What earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?' Marx

saw such development of 'productive forces', creation of a material basis for socialist/communist society of the future, as the historical task of capitalism. But Marx also saw capitalism as denying, or making impossible, the realisation of new possibilities now opening up for humankind. In other words, Marx's vision of a good society beyond capitalism was born of his critique of capitalism; not a blueprint, socialism for Marx was a negation of capitalism.



In the course of this critique, even as Marx noticed, along with the productive achievements of capitalism, its destructive material consequences as a class-exploitative system, Marx drew attention to the moral and cultural ravage capitalism wreaks upon humankind. He noted that man, stripped of his 'human essence' when he first fell into the class of the exploited, faces 'the destruction of all humanity' in him under capitalism. The process of capitalist exploitation, with its attendant 'greed and the war between the greedy—competition', holds human beings, the capitalists as well as the workers, in its compulsive grip and puts them at the mercy of 'the blind forces of the market'. It transforms free creative self-activity of man into alienated labour and reduces man himself into 'a commodity'. It 'estranges man from nature, from himself, his own active functioning'. It alienates 'man from man'. Capitalism tears up 'all genuine bonds between men', and dissolves 'the world of men into a world of atomized individuals, hostile to each other'. It leaves 'no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment"', and resolves 'personal worth into exchange value'. Every aspect of human life is commodified and the very things which were once 'communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—' now become marketable and pass 'into commerce'. 'The *divine* power of money' overturns and confounds 'all human and natural qualities' in the market place....

In pointing out the alienating, depersonalising and dehumanising consequences of capitalism, Marx particularly focused attention on the fact that for all the glorious *human*

senses, whose concrete and active exercise alone constitutes the true content of a genuinely rich human life, capitalism substitutes a single historically transient abstract sense, *the sense for property*, which plays havoc with human personality and plunges man into what has been well-described as 'the terrible inner sickness of an acquisitive society'. As Marx put it: 'In place of *all* these physical and mental senses there has come the sheer estrangement of *all* these senses—the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world.' For Marx the so-called rich man of capitalism was 'ever poorer as a man', robbed of real life and crippled in his inner being. Marx wrote, 'the more you *have*, the less you *are*', and insisted that 'the transcendence of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes'. He spoke of communism, 'the *actual* phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery', 'as the *positive* transcendence of *private property as human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real *appropriation of the human essence* by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (that is, human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development'. Marx adds: 'What is to be avoided above all is the reestablishing of "society" as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the *social being*. His life ...is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*.'



Marx made a distinction between the 'realm of necessity' and the 'realm of freedom'. He noted the inescapable fact that in all societies, material production is necessary to maintain life. 'Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production'. Marx saw this, the realm of material production, as the 'realm of necessity'. The choice here is between the capitalist and the socialist ways of carrying out material production, that is, between producing according to the

capitalist criteria, 'the pseudo-moral principles', as Keynes once put it, 'which have hag-ridden us for 200 years (and) by which we have exalted some of the most distasteful of human qualities into the position of the highest virtues', or, as Marx advocated, producing according to socialist principles, that is, as 'associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature ... with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature'. For Marx, however, 'it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity'. The 'realm of freedom' lies beyond it, it 'begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus, in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material of production'. Marx characterised it as 'that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with the realm of necessity as its basis'. That is how socialism or communism for Marx has a material basis, but it is *not* material fulfilment. What true human fulfilment, 'the realm of freedom' and its 'blossoming forth' mean has been well suggested by the Marxist philosopher, Ladislav Stoll. Pointing out that 'in place of many-sided, active, concrete appropriation of life and the world, through which the individual says not only "I see, I hear, I smell, I taste, I touch" but also "I work, I study, I love, I admire, I struggle for a happier tomorrow"—in place of all this wealth of emotion, capitalism makes one single emotion supreme: "I have"', Stoll has written: 'The truly human way of appropriating the world's riches is that by which man really overcomes the world, in other words, with all his senses, concretely. And here it is not a question only of five physical senses, for unlike the animals man has a whole series of glorious human senses, not only the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, but also a sense for music, a sense for poetry, a sense for the plastic arts, a sense for science, a sense for mathematics, a sense for history, crystallography, etc. It is only when a man begins to satisfy the needs of these glorious human senses, which one and all are the product of historical development, that he can appropriate to himself all the beauties of the world and become genuinely rich.'



Such was Marx' vision of our future—and it was no idealist utopia. It was firmly grounded in the possibilities then existing and maturing in the womb of society—possibilities which now stand enhanced many times over by the scientific-technological revolutions of recent times. Marx had hoped for the realisation of his vision in countries where capitalism had created the necessary material basis for it, that is, in the industrially advanced countries. But history played a trick on Marx's hope. Of the European revolutions at the end of the first world war—which Marx had anticipated—only the revolution in Russia survived. Instead of socialism being built on a base provided by the economic, political and cultural achievements of capitalism, a single backward country was called upon to build it, and build it in the midst of a most hostile global domination of capitalism. Lenin recognised the predicament and, possibly, had the potential to make a creative Marxist response to this entirely unanticipated situation, a response which, to put it in Marxist terms, involved simultaneous development of productive forces and building up of socialist relations of production as the basis of a new society. Lenin saw this as a struggle where 'defeat' was a distinct possibility, and wrote: 'Struggle and struggle alone, decides, how far we shall advance.' But the struggle, especially after Lenin's early departure, was not adequate enough. Logic of backwardness, compulsions of sheer survival, scientistic Marxism and economism in theory ('theory of productive forces'), flaws in the character of men who led—all taking their toll, what got built was a grievously deformed socialism. And now, seventy odd years later, a finally defeated Russia has been sucked back into global capitalism. What has happened was not inevitable, but it has happened, leaving the world more capitalist than ever before. But, for this very reason, as I have argued earlier, also making Marxism more relevant than ever before.



Since India is a part of this capitalist world and, with our rulers opting for 'globalisation', is becoming still more a part of it, this relevance does not exclude India. Therefore, before I

conclude, a quick reference to our own situation today will not be out of place.

It is not much remembered these days that we were very much a globalised country not so long ago. Before 1947, we were part of a global system, well-integrated into a world market economy. We were globalised, but we did not like it. Our globalisation then also had a name, imperialism, and we struggled against it, precisely because it meant—by virtue of its structural logic—accumulation of wealth in England and poverty in India. Like other third world countries, we wanted to get out of this globalisation to be able to opt for an independent, self-reliant development in the interests of our common people. Herein lay the essential meaning of our long struggle for freedom. It is significant of our rulers today that those presently in power or their forbears, when not in opposition to this struggle had little to do with it, and those now in opposition, claiming to be successors of Gandhi and Nehru, have long forgotten what this struggle was about and would like us all to do the same.

Freedom won—a transfer of power from foreign to Indian hands which however left the old socio-economic and state-bureaucratic structures largely intact—our post-colonial rulers set up a 'national project' of self-reliant economic development to supplement the recently won political freedom with the more important economic freedom for the Indian people. But it only led to the development of a state supported India-specific capitalism and, passing through crises and producing tragedies for the people mid-sixties onward, finally collapsed in 1991. In such matters, the subjective concerns of leaders or rulers matter—but only marginally. More decisive are the necessities of the objective material conditions. In the absence of revolutionary politics, which changes these conditions, the economic-structural basis of society, it is the logic of this basis that prevails. That is how for all Gandhi's love and concern for the Indian people, which to him meant, above all, the impoverished peasantry of India—'the semi-starved masses ... slowly sinking to lifelessness', as he put it—it is not Gandhi's peasant but, metaphorically speaking, a Birla who inherited India in 1947;

and for all his awareness of the 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order', Nehru's 'socialistic pattern of society' ended up as India-specific capitalism. Hence also the ultimate collapse of the 'national project' of self-reliant economic growth in the interests of the Indian people.

The evidence of this collapse is all over the place. It is there in the disintegration of values and degradation of life all around us, in the continuing poverty of our people and growing consumerism of the elites and a society at once cynical and fearful about the future. It is there in official statistics and pages of the private media, in our 'two nations' and 'internal colonialism', and the so-called 'national mainstream' which, bearing the impress of India's corrupt and corrupting, somewhat lumpen capitalist development, is increasingly, a dirty affair—corrupt, communal and criminalised, a repressively homogenising mainstream. The evidence is there in the visionless and so obviously laboured efforts of the powers-that-be to flog a tired and flabby patriotism into some semblance of life that characterised the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence and included a Colgate-sponsored televised selling of *Vande Matarams* by hordes of India's VIPs and VVIPs. And the evidence is most pathetically there in the impotence (or is it hypocrisy?) of the supposedly 'stirring' calls made on the occasion—in Parliament for a 'second freedom struggle' and by the Prime Minister to 'begin the struggle for economic freedom', which left us wondering about our 'first freedom struggle' and what the past fifty years were about.



The post-independence 'national project' having finally collapsed, India's ruling classes, through their major political formations, have gone in for 'globalisation' as their strategic option for the future. Having benefited from the state-supported capitalist development of the past, they now see their interests as lying with the free-marketeering global capitalism. But the historical experience in India, and elsewhere in the third world, makes it abundantly clear that the Indian people will find no answers to their problems in capitalism, national, as built under Nehru in the name of 'socialistic pattern' or now advocated by

the RSS in the name of 'swadeshi', or globalised that the ruling elites have opted for. There is much noise over 'growth rates' and 'trickle downs'. 'Trickle down' occurs but rarely, and at best remains, as Galbraith once described it, feeding oats to horses so that some of it passes down to the road for the sparrows! As for 'growth rates', this is how a former President of Brazil once reported about his country in Washington: 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not'. Therefore, the Indian economy may do 'fine' (with its growth rates, etc.) but the Indian people will not. For such indeed is the structural logic of capitalism as a market-governed economy. This logic also makes for 'the secession of the successful' as the Harvard economist Robert Reich has phrased it. 'Globalisation' as an option means 'the successful' of our society, its ruling elites, have decided to 'secede' from their market-wise 'unsuccessful' fellow countrymen, the common Indian people. This is not a matter only of economic policies and their outcome for the people. The 'secession' is as much visible in the values, concerns and lifestyles of the Indian elites, in the 'culture' splashed across television screens and the coloured supplements of 'national' newspapers, and in the pitiful protests of the 'cultural nationalists', cabinet ministers downwards, who want a market-economy but not the market morality and culture that necessarily come with it.

The ruling classes having chosen 'globalisation' as their new strategic option, our people are confronted with the task of defining and struggling for an alternative strategic option of their own. This, however, is not a subject I can pursue here. Immediately I will only say that Marxism can help our people better understand what has been and is now happening our country, and thus also help them define and struggle for a strategic option of their own. It is certainly time that leaders on the left and in the people's movements begin to think and act as Marx would have thought and acted in their place.



Let me conclude with a briefest of brief final statement. Marx was optimistic about the future of socialism. But he was no determinist. There are no inevitabilities or guarantees of victory

in Marx. Even as he insisted in the *Communist Manifesto* that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle', Marx had immediately added that this struggle 'each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes'. He had hailed the productive achievements of capitalism. But he had also pointed out both the damage capitalism regularly inflicts upon man and nature and its long term destructive potential which Rosa Luxemburg well summed up in her prophetic poser: 'socialism or barbarism'. Capitalism living beyond its historical time indeed spells a future of barbarism for humankind. It could be a nuclear holocaust that its politics has threatened for half a century or the almost certain ecological disaster which—the noise over so-called 'sustainable development' notwithstanding—capitalism's accumulative logic now portends. Barbarism of sorts is in fact already creeping upon us, in India and worldwide, if only we are willing to see. As Engels put it, 'history is about the most cruel of all goddesses'. History has been cruel, so far at least, to Marx, to Lenin and Mao, as also to Gandhi and Nehru and many others besides. It can well be cruel to all of us. But then, as Marxism has it, in human affairs nothing is inevitable till it happens. We can fight back and reject the future the masters are making for us. In the final analysis it is how we struggle and fight back that will decide our future. We can still make the new millennium *our* millennium.

Chapte 6

Talking of a Few Forgotten or Forbidden Things *

There has been some confusion among friends over the subject of my lecture this evening. The Hindi translation has even suggested that I am going in for an exercise in nostalgia. Not difficult to understand. After all, what else is left to do for people like me who have known better times when the country was not so misshapen politically and its Left politics had some real bite to it, when so many of its well-meaning VIPS had not yet attained to secular sainthood or degenerated into statesmen. A brief introduction to what I am going to speak about is, therefore, in order and I seek your indulgence for the way it is mixed up with an issue of strictly personal nature.

I

Invited to deliver this lecture I was happy and felt privileged to be associated with a function in memory of my friend, late Professor Jaidev, but I had reservations about speaking on the occasion. I belong to an age or generation when we learnt certain ways of thinking and acting and therefore speaking about things which are so out of fashion these days. It was an age when, like so many others of my generation, I left home and studies to chase a dream in the freedom struggle and the communist

* Professor Jaidev Memorial Lecture (September 28, 2002), published in *Mainstream*, March 15, 2003.

movement, spent time in jail with Bhagat Singh's surviving comrades, worked with them and those giants of human beings, the Ghadrite babas from the aborted uprising of 1914-15, in pursuit of freedom from the imperialist rule and a social revolution in the country. The unrealised concerns of those days not only remain relevant, the issues they raise today are a matter of life and death for our people. Yet, platitudinous reference on ceremonial occasions or at election times apart, serious consideration of these concerns or issues has come to be regarded as 'old fashioned', as being out of sync with our 'post-modernist' globalised times. The public discourse is so overwhelmingly dominated by the supposedly more relevant new concerns or issues that, speaking as 'a communist with a small "c"', to borrow that most helpful self-description from E.P. Thompson, has often left me feeling as an 'outsider', a 'dinosaur', as it were, from another age. Earlier this year I confessed as much at the Lady Shri Ram College. That there was an affectionate protest from the students and teachers was reassuring. There is also the inspiring example of friends like Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff (at the *Monthly Review*). I am also aware of the small constituency which is there for what I have to say. Yet *that* feeling is never entirely absent. Also, for me it has been important that the wood is not missed for the trees, that is, the basics have to be clearly stated and understood to make proper sense of the details (which however is not to in any way underestimate the latter's importance, for that is the level at which life is lived and the reality has to be ultimately grasped and engaged with). This necessarily involves repeating at least a few basic things and I have been finding this repetition a rather unpleasant experience. Accordingly, I expressed my reluctance to speak on this occasion and eventually got away with the evasive promise to 'think it over'.

Then I ran into something which helped towards more balanced thinking in the matter. It was the report of a dialogue (in 1999) between two most distinguished persons of our time, the Nobel laureate for literature Gunter Grass and the world-famous sociologist Pierre Bourdieu—men, so to speak, on my side of the barricades. They saw what is happening in the world

in the name of neo-liberalism as 'simply a return to the methods of nineteenth-century Manchester liberalism, in the belief that history can be rewound', 'a conservative revolution, as the term was used between the wars in Germany—a strange revolution that restores the past but presents itself as progressive, transforming regression itself into a form of progress'. And, they noted: 'It does this so well that those who oppose it are made to appear regressive themselves. This is something we have both endured: we are readily treated as old-fashioned, "has-beens", "throwbacks"... (even) "Dinosaurs".' They were nevertheless agreed that one must continue to speak, use all means to make oneself heard. Grass had even this comforting thought for me: 'In politics you have to repeat and repeat, like a parrot, ideas you know to be correct and proven as such, which is exhausting—you constantly hear the echo of your own voice, and end up sounding like a parrot even to yourself. But this is evidently part of the job, if one is to find any listeners at all in a world so full of different voices,' or, as I then thought, when the noisy voice of those currently dominant in society seeks to drown all other voices and wants us to forget what was said earlier and is known to be true, and forbids what needs to be said or repeated anew today.

Needless to say, when the invitation to deliver this lecture was later renewed, I readily agreed and decided to speak of 'a few forgotten or forbidden things'.

II

What I am going to say, therefore, is not an exercise in nostalgia over any past. It is an exercise in theory concerned primarily with the present and future of our people. During the heady, rebel days in the late 1960s, students of Paris used to ask of everyone who would address them to first tell them: 'Where do you speak from?' For every speaker inescapably speaks from a particular philosophical-political standpoint and owes it to his audience to publicly state it. It is only fair to admit that I am going to speak from the standpoint of Marxism, not 'official Marxism' of any kind but Marxism of Karl Marx, rather Marxism as I understand it. I have no time now to spell it out. Immediately

I will only say that while Marxism is undoubtedly an offspring of Western-centred thought, it needs to be recognised that it had, especially as Marx himself was shaping it in his later years, the potential to transcend its European origins and to become a truly universal theory—as it indeed became in the twentieth century. Very much more than historical materialism and critique of capitalism, Marxism has been and remains everywhere the most adequate theory for pro-people revolutionary politics in our times. Working people have fought their most heroic battles, won their greatest victories, even made revolutions, under its banner. Those who would struggle for the interests of the poor and oppressed in our country, who seek a radical social transformation of our society, cannot afford to be indifferent to, ignorant or dismissive of Marxism.

I will speak of a few, and only a few, things which have been forgotten or forbidden, that is, pushed out of public discourse in the consensus that India's dominant classes have currently built around their ideology—an ideology is seldom, if ever, all of one piece; generally it is constituted by many ideas, doctrines, systems of dogma and philosophies which seemingly compete and are even in conflict with each other, but are socially or politically supplementary—to reinforce their domination in society. Which things, therefore, need to be remembered and put back into public discourse if Indian people's interests have to be advanced. Given the constraint of time, I will be advancing bare propositions in most cases, with little or no explanation (or qualifications which are necessary to secure better validity for them). If the argument therefore appears to be crude or simplified—which it most certainly is not—immediately I will only hazard the consideration that crudeness and simplification, at times, help to make the truth of things more visible. Evidence for my argument is there all around us, if only we are willing to see—only a little reason and ability to interconnect are needed. Theory, let me finally add, does not directly yield a political programme. This is a task for the activists on the ground. Theory provides understanding, a perspective or sense of direction. A struggling people will not get very far without some substantial knowledge of the structures they need to overthrow for their

emancipation and a sense of direction in their struggle. This is what Marxism, as I suggested earlier, best provides.

III

Marcuse has said somewhere that the success of a system is when it makes alternatives unthinkable. With the collapse of the Soviet Union—it need not have collapsed, but it did—this is the success that capitalism achieved, or seemed to have achieved in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse. What was built as socialism in the Soviet Union was not socialism as it is visualised in the classical Marxist tradition. Its grievously deformed character had compelled so many of us to speak of it as ‘actually existing socialism’. It nevertheless betokened a possibility, the possibility of escape from the essentially predatory system that is capitalism, and therefore symbolised socialism as an alternative to capitalism. Its failure in the Soviet Union was seen as the ‘triumph of capitalism’, rendering socialism, for that matter any other alternative to capitalism, unthinkable. It was not only that ‘there is no alternative’ to it, capitalism was now so universal as to become virtually invisible. Not just escape from it, even to see or *think* capitalism became impossible. Even as capitalism, become truly global, was penetrating to the very heart and soul of social life and nature, capitalism, its critique or search for an alternative disappeared from public discourse.

The reality of capitalism catching up, the euphoria over ‘triumph of capitalism’ is long over in the advanced capitalist world. But it is still resonant in the ‘silences’ of the public discourse in India and in the Indian ruling elites’ secular or communal commitment to ‘economic reform’ as they call it. Capitalism or ‘market society’ is taken for granted, for them it is the only possible mode of existence. Even as the reality of a third world capitalism is painfully there all around us, not only is socialism forgotten (except for occasional denigration), even a discussion of capitalism is conspicuously absent. In the consensus built around the establishment ideology, to *think* capitalism remains decreed out of fashion. It is important therefore that capitalism, its critique and the question of a

socialist alternative are put back into public discourse. Today, more than ever before we need to *think* capitalism, to talk about it. It may be added that this is best done with Karl Marx, for he, more than any other human being, then or now, devoted his life to explaining the reality or logic of capitalism and his achievement here remains unrivalled.

Such is Marx’s achievement here that he will be with us so long as we live in a capitalist society. It is noteworthy that dismissed as obsolete a few years ago, Marx is already back in the West. ‘Spectres of Marx’, says Derrida, continue to haunt neo-liberalism, and not a few of those who still speak of ‘failure of communism’, have been writing of ‘the ghost of Marx’ hovering ‘over the global landscape with a knowing smile; the gross conditions that inspired Karl Marx’s original critique of capitalism in the nineteenth century are present and flourishing again.’

Marx is not only back but is going to be there so long as capitalism lasts. Towards the end of eighties, in the last century, as the communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, the *New Yorker*, an upmarket magazine in the United States, celebrated the occasion with an article by the eminent economist Robert Heilbroner titled ‘Triumph of Capitalism’, whose argument reverberated worldwide, setting off a new round of hosannas for capitalism and renewed pronouncements of ‘the death of Marxism’. The argument was seriously flawed but that is not my concern at the moment. The immediately important fact is that less than a decade later, towards the end of 1997, in a bout of futurology, bringing together a series of articles around the theme ‘what’s next?’, the same *New Yorker* went looking for the ‘next most influential thinker’, and the article, written by John Cassidy who is no Marxist, now or ever before, was entitled, ‘The Return of Karl Marx’! Cassidy felt persuaded to write the article when a friend, having reached the highest positions in the US corporate world, told him it was just as Marx had it. The article had concluded: ‘His (Marx’s) books will be worth reading as long as capitalism endures.’

IV

Capitalism has to be brought back into our public discourse because the world we are living in is a capitalist world. The Soviet Union has collapsed and the cause of socialism has received a worldwide beating. But capitalism remains. It needs to be understood and alternatives have to be sought.

Capitalism today is, of course, not as Marx saw and studied it in the nineteenth century. It has undergone changes, important changes, since then, and it is necessary to recognise them for understanding, and struggling against, contemporary capitalism. But as Raymond Williams once warned, in taking note of what has changed in capitalism, we must not make the mistake of underestimating everything that has not changed. And this 'everything', above all, includes the structural logic of capitalism, the law-like tendencies of its capital-accumulative process which, as Marx explicated, have meant uneven and unequal development within and across countries. Within countries, even when somewhat curbed in the advanced centres of capitalism—which curbing however remains reversible as the current dismantling of the 'welfare state' in the West shows—they have had the consequence of generating wealth and affluence at one end and poverty and deprivation at the other. Worldwide the consequence has been imperialist expansion and a gap between the centre and the periphery of global capitalism, an every-widening gap between wealth and poverty at the two poles. This exploitative structural logic of capitalism is as much at work today as it was when Marx first studied and analysed capitalism. In fact it is all the more at work now as, with globalisation, the world is more capitalist today than it has been for along time—a reality which bourgeois ideology seeks to obscure through its myth-making over 'globalisation'. This myth-making or ideological mystification, 'globaloney' as it has been called, seeks to suggest as if something is happening which has never happened before, as if a whole new epoch of benevolence and prosperity for all has opened in human history, an epoch in which things like capitalism, imperialism, exploitation, and therefore socialism, are all a matter of the past. It needs to be clearly understood that 'globalisation' has a proper

name, capitalism, global capitalism in its current phase of development.

Capitalism has been from the very beginning, by its very nature, a globalising system. Adam Smith knew it and you will find its sharpest, and literally prophetic, expression in the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx wrote of how 'the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe', how it 'must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere', how it has 'established the world market' and 'through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country', how it 'batters down all Chinese walls' and 'compels all nations to adopt the bourgeois mode of production, i.e. to become bourgeois themselves', and so on. 'Globalisation', thus, is nothing new, no new epoch in the history of humankind. It is only another phase in the process of capitalist expansion, of course with its own more or less important specificities.

The most important specificity to be noticed about the current phase of globalisation is its radical departure from the way capitalism existed during the previous period of post-war boom, the 'golden age' of capitalism. Capitalism of this period was marked by Keynesian strategies of moderate macro-economic regulations and the accompanying limits on capital's unending thirst for more profits, collectively known as the 'welfare state', which, incidentally, saved capitalism from its own self-destructive tendencies—as manifested, for example, in the Great Depression—and also helped it acquire a much-needed 'human face', against the internal and external threat of socialism. The onset of a structural crisis of capitalism, which gives every sign of being irreversible, has changed all that. The 1970s saw the world economy going into a downturn that has worsened through every recession since; the gap between business cycles is getting smaller, barely does recovery begin, the growth falters. 'Globalisation', with its neo-liberalism, is essentially a response to this structural crisis of capitalism and signifies a return, as it were, from an atypical to typical capitalism, from the aberration that was the post-war 'golden

age', to a period of normal, 'free-market' capitalism. For capital to remain 'competitive' in the global market, Keynesian state interventions in the economy have to go. Nor can capitalism now afford to wear a 'human face'; with the threat of socialism having receded, perhaps, it also does not need to wear it any more. The exceptional circumstances that made it possible for the working classes in the West, especially Western Europe, to fight and curb the exploitative logic of capitalism have passed into history. That these working classes are today fighting to defend their hard won gains should not obscure the fact that even in the advanced capitalist West it is no longer capitalism with a human face but back to the laws of the jungle of a normal capitalism.

'Globalisation' abroad has its own specificity in the new phase. If at home 'globalisation' is capitalism all over again, albeit now showing itself in its nakedness, abroad it is imperialism all over again, albeit in a new shape or form, when, the logic of capitalism now become more or less universal, imperialism achieves its ends not so much by the old forms of military expansion but primarily by unleashing and manipulating the exploitative and destructive impulses of the capitalist market. This however is not to deny the continuing importance of wars or the use of military means for imperialist purposes. We have the most obvious contemporary example of the United States' use of its military power to grab control of the oil resources of the Middle-East and Central Asia and to establish pax-Americana in the world, that is, keep the world 'free' as a freely exploitable area in which giant American corporations can do business on their own terms.

Beyond these two specific features, globalisation in its current phase has an aspect to it which needs to be specifically noted. Post-Soviet collapse, capitalism's impulse to globalise or universalise has so realised itself that capitalism is today a truly global or universal system, such as it has never been before. This has meant universalisation of its polarisations between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. Its success, so to speak, has carried its failures with it, which however is nothing new or suprising. This is how it has always been with capitalism—

exceptional productivity and most inequitable distribution, production of wealth and poverty at the two poles of society. More significant, however, is the fact of universalisation, and therefore sharpening of its contradictions and self-destructive tendencies, including the inherent tendency to overproduce, to regular crises of overproduction. Historically, capitalism could and was indeed able to resolve or 'displace' these contradictions and escape the consequences of its self-destructive tendencies primarily by deeper penetration within and expansion abroad. To the extent it has become universal, the old escape routes are now that much less available. As Ellen Meiksins Wood has written:

Now, capitalism has no more escape routes, no more safety valves or corrective mechanisms outside its own internal logic. Even when it's not at war, even when it's not involved in the old forms of inter-imperialist rivalry, it's subject to the constant tensions and contradictions of capitalist competition. Now, having more or less reached its geographic limits and ended the spatial expansion that supported its earlier successes, it can only feed on itself; and the more successful it is on its own terms—in other words, the more it maximizes profit and so-called growth—the more it devours its own human and natural substance.

The ultimate success of capitalism, its universal ascendancy, has also brought it to the brink of its worst failure. This condition is an important component of the structural crisis—a 'depressed continuum', Meszaros has called it—that today grips global capitalism. That some countries are doing well even in the midst of this crisis, or have cyclical upswings, is something that has happened throughout the history of capitalism and does not negate the reality of this crisis, the intractable problems that capitalism as a global system is now faced with. This is not to suggest any imminent collapse of capitalism—systems don't collapse like that and capitalism, supported by the capitalist state, has been exceptionally resilient in the past to survive its crises. But the situation does suggest the need and new opportunities for struggle against capitalism, for that forgotten and forbidden thing called class struggle.

V

In view of the centrality of the question of capitalism and struggle against it for the present and future of our people, I would like to take another look at capitalist triumphalism before turning to a few issues of more specific relevance to India.

Robert Heilbrunner's aforementioned *New Yorker* article, 'Triumph of Capitalism', opened with the sentence:

Less than seventy-five years after it officially began, the contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won.

This bland proposition is not as self-evident or unquestionable as it is presented to be. What contest does this capitalist triumphalism has in mind? If the contest was military, the history of our times, from Churchill in 1917 to Reagan in 1987, and Hitler in between, is witness to total failure of capitalism, despite repeated efforts, to destroy socialism as it existed in the Soviet Union or any other socialist state by force of arms. If it was economic, however flawed in planning or deformed otherwise, socialist economy in the Soviet Union had great and in some cases truly astonishing achievements to its credit, without parallel in the history of capitalist development anywhere in the world—all the more significant because of the surrounding circumstances, particularly the starting point of extreme backwardness, made worse by the ruination of the First World War and a civil war, and later, having to begin from the scratch again after the Second World War, and a totally hostile international environment, capitalism's constant pressure of hot and cold war throughout. In terms of quality of life, of how the economy affects the everyday life and well-being of the common man or woman, with its guaranteed employment, cradle-to-grave social security, healthcare, education, housing, transport, etc. within everyone's reach, huge subsidisation of literature, music and arts and the diffusion of classical world culture on a mass scale, the Soviet Union had assured for vast masses of ordinary citizens a life of material security and moral and aesthetic culture far superior to what even the countries of advanced capitalism have to offer to the common people.

Very much more could be said on this subject, but my

concern here is not with this issue but with a logical flaw in Heilbrunner's argument which, when taken note of, is suggestive of—beyond the so-called 'triumph of capitalism' or 'failure of socialism' today—the most important feature of the present historical period and the possibilities it holds for our future.

Heilbrunner has been more cautious in his later pronouncements. But more to the point is the fact that over a long period of time, since he wrote *The Worldly Philosophers* in 1953, till the mid-1980s and even afterwards, he has been, if anything, a very perceptive critic of capitalism. He did not see capitalism as much of a success and even wrote (in 1985) that 'its eventual demise or supersession by another social order is universally foreseen'. Obviously, it is illogical to conclude from the failure of socialism—the 'actually existing socialism' of the Soviet Union—the success or triumph of capitalism. Rather, the only logically valid proposition Heilbrunner is entitled to advance is that both capitalism and the attempt to build 'another social order', namely, socialism, have failed in our time. This is indeed the case today, of course with the important difference that while the failure of socialism was essentially the outcome of contingent human and historical factors—which leaves open the possibility of a successful effort in future—the failure of capitalism, far from being anything contingent, is the inevitable consequences of the basic law of motion, the structural logic of capitalism, its inner accumulative drive and contradictions which even as they are essential to its enormously powerful and creative dynamic of growth, are also the cause of its destructive outcome in the world as a whole.

The failure of both capitalism and the first attempt at building socialism points to the present historical period as a period of an epochal transition—transition from capitalism to socialism—comparable to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It has all the material, moral and psychological symptoms of a transitional epoch, when the old is, so to speak, played out—the evidence is there all over the capitalist world today—and the new is struggling to be born.

Historians have told us that the first efforts at building

capitalism during the Middle Ages also failed, smothered by the surrounding feudalism, till centuries later, a new conjuncture emerged in which a budding capitalism, benefiting well from its earlier abortive appearances, could take root and grow powerful enough to fend off its enemies and survive, to finally arrive as it did in England and other Atlantic societies, over a period of four or five centuries. Therefore, in a long-term perspective, the failure of history's first socialist effort does not mean that more successful future efforts are impossible. But this 'long-term' is today loaded with a problematic. Once available to capitalism to emerge, consolidate itself, and grow dominant, *time* is no longer available to socialism.

The structural logic of capitalism, its insatiable accumulative appetites, now threaten a universal ecological disaster. J.B. Foster, the eminent eco-sociologist, has written:

Human society has reached a critical threshold in its relation to the environment. The destruction of the planet, in the sense of making it unusable for human purposes, has grown to such an extent that it now threatens the continuation of much of nature, as well as survival and development of society itself.

Scientists have been warning that we are on the verge of 'the sixth mass extinction'—this time, unlike the previous five, at the hands of humanity. And this is not the only threat looming on our horizon. Another is posed by capitalism's imperialistic militarism, long exemplified by the US and British military policy—'liberal militarism' David Edgerton has called it. Today, the US has the largest stockpile of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the world and it has not hesitated to use them. It is the only country ever to have used the nuclear weapons. As part of its imperialist politics, it has created innumerable 'Ground Zeroes' all over the world. The possibility is real that with its short-run vision, arrogance as well as impotence of power and the Bushite 'make no mistake' 'greatest nationism', the US may well come 'to play Samson in the temple of humanity', as Paul Sweezy once put it.

That socialism may not have time to come up again and be successful has an important implication. Marx always maintained that there are alternatives in history. With capitalism

living beyond its historical time, the alternative he foresaw was long ago expressed by Rosa Luxemburg in the formula: 'either socialism or descent into barbarism'. With capitalism now threatening humanity with barbarism, socialism still remains the only alternative. The future of socialism is as bright or bleak as that of humanity itself.

VI

With the country a part of the global capitalist system and our rulers set on globalisation, that is, a new round of capitalist development under cover of 'economic reform', it is important that the forgotten or forbidden question of capitalism, what capitalism this day and age has to offer our people, is put back in the public discourse in our country. Associated with this basic question are several more specific issues that need to be talked of—things which are forgotten but need to be remembered, which are missing or unrecognised in our discussions but need to be recognised and put in country's public discourse, especially in the discourse on the Left.

Most important perhaps is the need to remember that we were very much a globalised country not so long ago. Before 1947, we were part of a global system, well-integrated into a world market economy. We were globalised, but we did not like it. Our globalisation then also had a name, imperialism, and we struggled against it, precisely because it meant—by virtue of its structural logic—accumulation of wealth in England and poverty in India. Like other third world countries we wanted to get out of this globalisation to be able to opt for an independent, self-reliant development in the interest of our common people. Herein lay the essential meaning of our long struggle for freedom. It is significant of our rulers today that those presently in power or their forbears, when not in opposition to this struggle had little to do with it, and those now in Opposition, claiming to be successors of Gandhi and Nehru, have long forgotten what this struggle was about and would like us all to do the same. But our people need to remember. The globalising rulers are promising renewed 'economic growth' and are rather noisy over growth rates, etc.

They are not necessarily wrong and may well prove to be right. But the structural logic of capitalist economic growth remains what it has always been. 'The economy is doing fine, the people are not' is how a President of Brazil once reported it in Washington. So it is and will be with what our rulers are promising. Even the hoped-for 'trickle down', if it occurs, is no better than feeding horses with oats so that some of it passes down to the road for the sparrows, as Galbraith has described it. The consequences of the current globalisation are not likely to be very different from those of the globalisation our people had struggled hard and long to finally escape in 1947. Their peripheralisation this time could well be much worse.

VII

The post-colonial rulers in India, having gained power in the state, went on to set up a 'national project' of self-reliant economic development, promising 'equity and distributive justice', even 'a socialistic pattern of society' to the people. It is important to recognise that what got built as a consequence was not any kind of socialism, as the bourgeois ideologues propagate and people have come to believe, but a state-supported India-specific capitalism. The economy did 'fine', the people did not. There was a significant degree of economic growth, but a third worldist capitalism, there was nothing much in it for the common Indian people.

I cannot here go into the specificities of this capitalism but that things happened this way needs to be clearly understood. In large historical processes there are continuities and there are breaks, at times even revolutionary breaks which involve a change in the *economic basis*, the economic-structural relations, of society. In India, in our times, no revolutionary break has occurred, neither at Independence, nor afterwards. The balance of social forces and ideals in the national movement resulted in the settlement of 1947—its 'transfer of power' involving no basic economic or social or state structural change, but putting new, now *Indian* ruling classes in control of the state power in India. (Nearly two decades later, Gunnar Myrdal was to write of 'the new government's role as the successor to the British raj', of

'the gulf between rulers and ruled' and the lifestyle and conduct of the new rulers which 'encouraged the view that political independence had done little more than displace a foreign with a native privileged group'). The new rulers set about India's economic development even as they maintained, of course, with due modifications, the class (exploitative) structure of the Indian society as a whole. It is the logic of this structure, the new and the old well articulating with each other, which had a determining influence on what eventually came to be built in the country—an India-specific state-supported capitalism, with every aspect of our social life—politics, culture, morality, everything, everywhere—bearing the mark of this somewhat comprador capitalism.

In these matters, the *subjective* concerns of political leaders, of rulers or their political representatives, matter—but only marginally. In the absence of revolutionary politics which changes the *objective*, economic-structural basis of society, not only does the logic of this basis assert itself in the economy, it also decisively conditions developments in other areas of social life, in politics, morals culture, ideology, etc.—all changes, no matter how important otherwise, yet remain essentially superstructural. Thus, for example, we know of Gandhi's love and concern for the Indian people which to him meant, above all, the impoverished peasantry of India—'the semi-starved masses ... slowly sinking to lifelessness' as he once put it—a love and concern (rather paternal in nature, always fearful of people straying from the 'right' path) which was possibly the most distinguishing feature of Gandhi's social philosophy. Metaphorically speaking, he wanted the peasant to inherit this country. Yet it is not Gandhi's peasant but a Birla who inherited India in 1947, along with, of course, communal violence, the partition, and much else that Gandhi did not want. And of decisive importance here is the fact that, besides other limitations, Gandhi's political theory and practice (non-violence, trusteeship, satyagraha, etc.) had no room at all for any genuine economic-structural change, not even for radical land reforms, a necessary though not sufficient condition for any improvement in the life of the vast masses of Indian peasantry. Inevitably he

failed, here as also elsewhere in most of his declared purposes. Seeking to ensure 'the rights alike of prince and pauper', Gandhism, in effect, only served as a petty-bourgeois ideology in the service of the big bourgeoisie, in the Indian historical process. It is a mark of the greatness of Gandhi, a truly magnificent human being with all his faults, frailties and foibles, that in sharp contrast to the opportunism or pettiness of his many followers, he recognised his failure when it finally occurred, and confessed it—'I do not understand how all these terrible things are happening in our country... What mistakes have we made, for we must have made mistakes? Otherwise how could all these things happen?'—and died, as he had lived, fighting for his people, a fulfilled yet disillusioned and disconsolate man.

Or, again, we know of Nehru's concern to build socialism in India. He not only argued that 'the only key to the solution of... India's problems lies in socialism', but had insisted: 'and when I use this word I do so not in a vague, humanitarian way, but in a scientific, economic sense'. Aware of the need for 'vast and revolutionary changes', he most perceptively spoke of 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order'. Yet, once in power, Nehru shied away from the cost of even genuine land reforms—'they will present numerous practical problems involving basic social conflicts (and may) give rise to organised forces of disruption', the *Draft Outline* of the First Five-Year Plan warned. What is more, he simply abandoned socialism 'in a scientific, economic sense', that is, as a basic economic-structural change. Apart from the insistence on the state playing 'a vital part in planning and development', the focus is increasingly on the need to ensure 'rapid economic development with continually rising levels of production', 'to exploit natural resources', 'to take sufficient advantage of the advance in science and technology', etc. In fact, in a subtle, perhaps unconscious but politically most convenient shift, he now sought 'the key' not in socialism but in the development of 'science and technology'—'the temples of modern India' and all that. He increasingly opted for what I would describe as 'fetishism of science', that is, investing science with powers it does not in

itself have, expecting it to do the job of a social revolution, which it simply cannot. Inevitably, once again, the logic of the economic structure asserted itself. What got built in India was not socialism but capitalism, a state-supported capitalism. The rhetoric of socialism, now redefined as 'a socialistic pattern of society', whatever that meant, served only to deceive and win mass support. And Nehru, even as he gave India the then much-lauded 'vision of socialism', in effect, helped reduce it to only 'a vision' in India. History is indeed a very cruel mistress.

VIII

India's post-freedom 'national project' ended up building *not* socialism but capitalism—it is important to recognise this to make sense of what has happened in our country since Independence. But to understand the recent developments, particularly the turn to 'globalisation' and the rise of '*Hindutva*', it is necessary to recognise what can only be described as the final collapse of India's post-colonial 'national project'.

The Nehru era was, so to speak, the golden age of India's 'national project', such as it was. But mid-1960s onward, all kinds of extraneous factors contributing, it floundered and fast degenerated, its economic crises underpinning and moving in step with the crises of the political system, 'democratic politics' and all that. If India's 'national economy' generated any number of potentially explosive issues, its 'national politics' regularly turned these issues into problems, problems into running sores and these sores into tragedies for the Indian people, in Punjab, Kashmir, almost everywhere. By the end of the 1980s the national project was virtually over. Soon enough a dead-end economic crisis or financial bankruptcy of sorts, produced by the previously pursued policies, coincided with the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War and its eventual disintegration, depriving the Indian ruling classes of whatever little manoeuvrability they still had and leaving them more vulnerable than ever before to the offensive of a recharged global capitalism. Given the strong comprador or lumpen strain inherent in their character, led by their major political formation, the Congress-I, with their other political formations in tow, they

succumbed, and hiccups and protests notwithstanding, opted for what is turning out to be a junior partnership within the global capitalist system. As beneficiaries of 'growth' during the Nehru era and afterwards, and now with a substantial economic strength of their own, globalisation also provides them with new avenues of profit-making at home and abroad. Therefore, this 'succumbing' can also be seen as a natural progress for Indian capitalism. India was again globalised, this time through a largely voluntary submission of the Indian rulers. The national project finally and definitively collapsed in 1991.

The evidence of this collapse is there in the disintegration of values and degradation of life all around us, in the continuing poverty of our people and growing consumerism of the elites and a society at once cynical and fearful about the future. It is there in official statistics and pages of the private media and so-called 'national mainstream' which bearing the impress of India's corrupt and corrupting, somewhat lumpen capitalist development, is an increasingly dirty affair—corrupt, communal and criminalised, a repressively homogenising mainstream. Clinching it all perhaps is the evidence provided by the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of Indian independence: the Colgate-sponsored televised selling of *Vande Matarams* by hordes of VIP and VVIP Indians and the supposedly 'stirring' calls made on the occasion—in Parliament for a 'second freedom struggle' and by the Prime Minister to 'begin the struggle for economic freedom', which left one wondering what the past fifty years had been about. A Finance Minister had taken India back into globalisation, asking us not to be afraid of the East India Company, opened up India to the multinationals on the dishonest plea that 'the nation has been living beyond its means'—'nation' indeed, when a good majority of our people have simply no means to live and most others none to indulge in any 'living beyond'! His successor, more honest and ideologically committed, was now publicly pleading with the globalisers in London, the successors of East India Company, to come back to India for another equally long stay: 'You came to India and stayed for 200 years. Now come prepared to invest and stay for another 200 years, and there will be huge rewards.' The post-

colonial 'national project' was indeed over and done with.

The post-colonial, Nehruvian national project having finally collapsed, India's ruling classes, through their different political formations, have opted for 'globalisation' as their new strategic alternative—a shift from a state-supported to a wholly privatised, 'free-market' capitalism, from self-reliance in economic development to reliance on FDI and the multinationals. In politics, the shift, at least for the time being, is in some ways an even more dangerous turn for the worse. A somewhat liberal and secular national project having collapsed and the people failing to come up with their own alternative project, immediately it is the utterly reactionary, semi-fascist '*Hindutva* project' that has taken over, spelling its own disasters for the present and future of the Indian people. Here it needs to be understood that '*Hindutva*' has come up because our society today provides a continuing social-material basis for the production and reproduction, the rise, sustenance and spread of such ideas or ideologies and that, therefore, struggle against it has to be waged as part of the struggle to change this basis, that is, to radically transform our society, if it is not to get caught and lost in a 'secular-communal trap' as has indeed happened over the past decade and more. One does not have to be a Marxist to understand or recognise this. A long time ago, suggesting that ideas do not rise and prosper through some inherent power of their own, Herbert Spencer had said: 'Ideas wholly foreign to (a) social state cannot be evolved, and if introduced from without, cannot get accepted, or if accepted die out.' It is the economic, political and moral wreckage left behind by the failure of the Nehruvian project which has provided the 'social state', that is, the necessary social-material basis for the rise and growing acceptance of '*Hindutva*' as religious fundamentalism and a fascistic political ideology. 'Globalisation' or so-called 'economic reform', in its economic, political and moral-cultural consequences is daily piling up more such wreckage, creating more social-material basis for all sorts of religious fundamentalisms, regressive ideologies and disintegrative politics. A decade and a half back, apropos the growing crisis of Nehruvian 'national project', the explosive

problems being generated by India's economy and the politics of its ruling classes, I had written: 'it is fashionable these days to speak of India as "a nation-in-the-making". One might add that if you leave it to the ruling classes, India may well be on its way to be "a nation-in-the-unmaking"'. '*Hindutva*' as one form of ruling class politics, like its secular counterparts earlier, is now making its own distinctive contribution to this 'unmaking' and may well be a specific feature of the barbaric situation in India as part of the universal barbarism that capitalism now threatens the world with. That is, if the people do not effectively intervene, and do so in time, with ideology and politics, a strategic alternative, of their own.

IX

This is indeed the key forgotten and forbidden question today. How do people intervene? What should be our people's 'strategic alternative'?

We are here face to face with the most basic question of India's post-colonial existence: what does a late-arriving third world country do in a situation of global domination of capitalism? The question was somewhat obscured in 1947, due largely to the interim successes of the Soviet Union—a poor, backward country which seemed to have successfully broken out of this domination and built a self-reliant economy for the benefit of its people. Now that the Soviet Union has been sucked back into global capitalism—which is not to say it was inevitable—the question is with us, urgent and imperative as never before. Some 'nationalist' hiccups notwithstanding, our rulers and those allied with them have made their choice and in a characteristic act of 'secession of the successful' (the Harvard economist Robert Reich's phrase) 'seceded' from the people and gone over to the joys of junior partnership in the global capitalist economy. But how about the people? What is the people's strategic alternative? It is a real tragedy of the Left in India, and a part of the larger tragedy of the Indian people, that even the question remains unposed. The answer obviously remains unsought, with the consequences I have just pointed out.

X

Regardless of what has happened to socialism in the Soviet Union—there was no structural necessity about its failure, unlike capitalism's continuing failure in different parts of the world—socialism has to be the answer of the Indian people if they would survive and build a better life for themselves. This is an issue which the Left needs to put back in its discourse.

The historical experience in India and elsewhere in the third world makes it abundantly clear that so far as the common people are concerned, there is no answer to their problems in capitalism, national (including the one now, in effect, sought by the RSS and its *Swadeshi Jagaran Manch*) or globalised. The choice for them remains socialism, that is, a planned development and use of resources for people's benefit, or peripheralisation under capitalism.

This is not to posit socialism as achievable today or tomorrow, or even the day after for that matter, but to posit it as an alternative strategic goal, as the principle governing people's politics today, which links together their immediate, ongoing and emerging, struggles in an ultimate project of revolutionary transformation of our society, as the goal of a long transitional process, whose specifics and speed will depend upon the objective material conditions and the nature and balance of the class forces involved at each stage of the struggle for it. Immediately, it means saying 'no' to globalisation. This is not to argue for any kind of 'autarky' in economic development but to pose the issue of whether this development will be governed by *external* imperatives, those issuing from the requirements of the world capitalist market (export-led growth, etc.) and the associated consumerism of the rich, or primarily by *internal* imperatives, those flowing from an assessment of our own resources and the needs of our people.

The issue, in other words, is that of priorities: development for what and whom? Is it to satisfy the basic needs of the people or the consumerism of the elite in our society? The argument is for a pro-people socialism-oriented autonomous development which draws on our own strengths, our domestic resources and capacities, including those of the hardworking poor who still

remain the most creative and productive in our society, a development which gives the common people, in both urban and rural areas, a positive stake in the economy and mobilises them for building a better society and, let me add, for the inevitable struggle against global imperialism and its local allies or partners. This has to be the alternative strategic option of the Indian people.

This option has a decisively important implication which needs to be explicitly stated and recognised. A socialism-oriented autonomous development as a strategic option for our people is premised on *people's politics* and not 'the market' commanding the economy (which, however, does not rule out an useful role for the market in the economy). It may be added that if such development is necessary in the interests of our people and they have no choice but to attempt it if they would avoid peripheralisation, with the people *really in power* it is also possible. The failure of the world's first experiment in socialism notwithstanding, there is much in the socialist experience of our times to help guide this attempt and be hopeful about it: for example, in the still unparalleled achievements of the early years of post-revolutionary societies in Russia and elsewhere despite their economic backwardness, in Cuba's heroic struggle to build socialism and save the gains of its socialist revolution, in Lenin's socialist project during the few years that he survived the October Revolution, in the experience of the 'Mao years' in China, and so on. An uncharted territory, we can still enter it with confidence.

XI

The crux of the matter thus is people's power in the state, their 'political supremacy' in society as Marx would put it. Not phoney 'empowerment' from above, but people fighting and winning power for themselves through their own struggles. This demands the Left's recovery of its nearly lost or forgotten tradition of revolutionary politics, its recovery as a politics that knows how to relate to the emergent 'social movements' (including those of the dalits and tribals) and to subordinate parliamentary politics to the ultimately important extra-

parliamentary struggles. With the traditional Left politics either exhausted or lost on the terrain of 'mainstream' politics, the problems here are indeed intractable—all the more intractable because of the diversity and the continental dimensions of our country – almost everywhere calling for, if I may put it this way, India-specific versions of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* and *Where To Begin?* It is obviously going to be a long haul. Of the issues involved in this recovery of revolutionary politics as an alternative to the politics of the currently dominant classes, immediately I would like to mention only three.

It is a significant achievement of the ruling class politicians in India that, while their 'democratic politics' has failed to deliver so far as the people are concerned, they have managed to give politics itself a dirty name and thus helped themselves and helped better secure their system against revolutionary politics as well. 'Politics is dirty business', the much-mouthed middle class protest is only seemingly radical. It leaves the field all the more open for dirty politics, 'the politicians' politics' (*la politique politicienne*) as Malraux called it, and makes it that more difficult to develop an alternative 'people's politics'.

At the other end, 'civil society' activism—however welcome and admirable in many cases otherwise—has all too often served to rein in and depoliticise people's opposition to the established order of things, even helped the dominant classes to structure and appropriate this opposition for their own interests. Its local or partial focus rules out major struggles over fundamental choices in economy or politics. The rhetoric over 'empowerment of people' conceals the fact that the state as the site of struggle stands abandoned and with it stands abandoned the struggle for political power which, obfuscations of bourgeois political theory or 'civil society' ideologues notwithstanding, remains the pre-eminent form of power in our society. 'Civil society' or 'grass roots' activism has served to de-legitimise people's struggle for power in the state which a revolutionary politics seeks and needs to seek.

As Walter Benjamin pointed out long ago, the ruling classes always seek to take people's history away from them. This is particularly the case with the history of their successful

struggles, and heroes from the past. They do so through suppression, misrepresentation or slander, and at times through appropriation for their own purposes. Examples of the former are all too common to be mentioned here; a few can be easily found in the new, saffronised history textbooks of the NCERT. One of the latter, a contemporaneously relevant example is the effort over the years, and again more recently, to so appropriate Bhagat Singh and his struggle by reducing him to a 'great nationalist', when what he stood for was an alternative revolutionary politics, even class struggle, in opposition to the then dominant 'nationalist' politics—a concern most relevant to the present situation. Forget what Bhagat Singh thought or said of Marx or Lenin or the Russian Revolution or socialism. We only need to remember this magnificent statement: charged with 'waging war against the king', he had said:

Let us declare that the state of war does exist and shall exist so long as the Indian toiling masses are exploited by a handful of exploiters, be they purely British, or British and Indian in alliance, or even purely Indian.

An alternative revolutionary politics has to deny the ruling classes such 'taking away' of our people's history. It has to recover its revolutionary inheritance and combine it with the recovery and use of all other traditional and modern resources for the emancipatory struggles of today—doing this not eclectically, adding up names or ideas, but in a proper theoretical manner, that is, within an adequate, self-consistent framework which, in my opinion, is best provided by Marxism, its basic understanding of society and politics.

XII

Last but not least, we need to talk of 'nationalism', talk of it in a way that the dominant ideological climate in the country virtually forbids but, for that very reason, the situation in the country makes necessary. The viability of an alternative revolutionary politics geared to the strategic goal of socialism-oriented development is crucially dependent on our *critical* understanding of the question of nationalism. It is necessary to recognise the basic class divisions in our society, the divergence

of interests between the rulers and the ruled. Beyond the distinctions of religion or caste, we need to recover the distinction between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed, the distinction between 'them' and 'us' which stands so badly obscured today. The 'we' of the seminars and common parlance is quite deceptive; 'they' have a very real existence in our society which needs to be taken note of. The struggle for a socialism-oriented development cannot be seen as an adjunct of any national aspirations, or as a continuation, as it were, of the Indian people's earlier national struggle for freedom.

Nationalism is undoubtedly a powerful social, political and ideological force in our times. But it needs to be understood that it is yet a historical phenomenon with class and society-specific character, potentialities and limitations, and, therefore, capable of manifesting itself in diverse forms. Located as we are in the third world and with the still alive, though much faded, memories of our long struggle for freedom, we in this country are conventionally inclined to see nationalism as a positive value or ideal, even as a liberationist force or ideology. But this is not always or necessarily the case with nationalism. With the ruling classes in the normal pursuit of their interests, or when faced with situations of crisis, nationalism has often taken all sorts of anti-people, imperialist or statist or racist or fascist forms, providing ideological support to ruling class politics and political domination at home and abroad. In our own country, more particularly in recent decades, nationalism has been used by the post-colonial rulers to cover up or find alibis for their defaults, to conceal the social reality of our much-divided and exploitative society, to divert people away from their real concerns and mobilise them behind ruling class politics. This is what the Congress has traditionally done as part of its 'secular' politics. Defining it as 'cultural nationalism', this is what the BJP is now doing as part of its '*Hindutva politics*'—both doing it for the same purpose, serving the same ruling class interests.

Nationalism in India before 1947 was indeed progressive; under a different, more advanced class leadership and

programme, it could have been radical, even revolutionary. It was progressive because it aimed at resolving the basic structural contradictions of Indian society, congealed in imperialism, whose resolution alone could clear the path for Indian people's struggle for a better life. The struggle to resolve them, *against* imperialism, was our national struggle for freedom. But after 1947, with the post-colonial rulers having facilitated a historically specific form of capitalist development in the country, the basic contradictions that now need to be resolved to clear the path for Indian people's continuing struggle for a better life lie *within* the nation, and their resolution is a matter of struggle within, against the Indian ruling classes; therefore, strictly speaking, this struggle cannot be viewed simply as a national struggle. In fact, Indian people's continuing struggle against imperialism, globalisation's neo-colonialism, too is now a part of this new struggle within, and not a continuation of the old pre-1947 anti-imperialist struggle, because the neo-colonialist 'integration', rather reintegration, into the global capitalist economy is now occurring by the grace of, through the opportunities provided by, indeed at the invitation of, the new rulers at Delhi. Nationalism or a national perspective on things only obscures this most basic of all issues facing the Indian people.

(It is worth recalling the justificatory slogan, which soon became a national chorus, with which 'globalisation' or the so-called 'economic reform', was launched: 'the nation has been living beyond its means'—when a good majority of our people had been going to bed hungry and most others had nothing much to indulge in any 'living beyond'. The reference to 'nation' was really a nationalist lie which obscured this reality and provided a cover for those who had indeed been living beyond this country's poor means for long and were now set on continuing to do so under the new dispensation, those whom the Latin Americans have learnt to call 'anti-nation within the nation'.)

That is how the struggle for people's strategic option as against 'globalisation' that the Indian ruling classes have opted for, the struggle for socialism-oriented autonomous

development—which alone can also be an ecologically sustainable development as against a globalised Indian capitalism subject to the capital accumulative or profit-making imperatives of the market—is not a national struggle as such, nor a continuation of the earlier national struggle in India, though it can and may be seen as its transcendence in a strictly dialectical sense, that is, a struggle that carries forward the best traditions and hopes of the earlier liberationist struggles of the Indian people. It is in its basic character a class struggle in the proper Marxian sense which eschews its narrow economic or class-reductionist interpretations. No doubt a great deal of tactical resilience is necessary in relating it, theoretically as well as practically, to the obviously important question of nationalism. But even if this struggle is viewed as a national or 'national-popular' struggle of the Indian people, it cannot but be fighting the 'anti-nation within the nation', as the Latin Americans now call it, or 'rescuing the nation' from its ruling classes, or, as Marx would have put it, the people 'establishing itself as *the* nation', and thus remains, in its essential content, a class struggle. It cannot be seen as a collective struggle of all the people for a common good as, essentially, the struggle for national liberation was; it will be, more than anything else, a struggle for political power, winning it from the ruling classes, for purposes entirely opposite to theirs. That is how the national task, recovering the country for its people, is now, as it were, also a class task of the Indian people, people acting, as it were, as a 'nation class', to borrow a description from the Guinean Marxist revolutionary, Cabral.

XIII

Marx and Marxism? Socialism? People's strategic alternative? Revolutionary politics? Class struggle... all these forgotten or forbidden things? Isn't this asking for the impossible? Answer, the only apt answer for our times, is there, given by the French students in their May-June uprising of 1968. They had said: 'Be practical! Do the impossible!' Three-and-a-half decades later, it may be added: 'If we cannot do the impossible, we better prepare to face the unthinkable!' Some of it is already happening around us.

Chapter 7

A Note on the Current Political Situation in India*

Leaving aside the deeper-lying issues in understanding contemporary Indian politics, and confining myself to the national level, immediately the following facts or considerations are to be noted:

1. The overarching context of Indian politics today is the failure of the post-independence (Nehruvian) national project of state-led self-reliant economic development promising economic growth with 'equity and distributive justice' to the people. For understandable reasons, it did not work out as Nehru had intended. There was a degree of economic growth but not much equity or distributive justice for the people and the project ended up providing an India-specific government-supported third worldist capitalism. The rhetoric of 'socialistic pattern of society' only deceived the people, legitimised the statist capitalism that was coming up and created confusion about it as 'socialism' that has persisted to this day. Passing through a series of economic and political crises mid-1960s onward, the project finally collapsed in 1991. (Incidentally, state-intervention in the economy was deemed necessary by the then

economically and politically weak, relatively underdeveloped Indian bourgeoisie itself, which, as the major beneficiary of 'economic growth' during the Nehru era and afterwards, soon developed substantial strength of its own and grew hopeful of new avenues of profit-making at home and abroad in partnership with global capitalism).

2. The post-independence national project having collapsed, 1991 onwards, India's ruling classes, through their different political formations, have gone in for 'globalisation' as their new strategic option—a shift from the state-supported capitalism to a wholly privatised 'free market' capitalism and from self-reliance in economic development to reliance on Foreign Direct Investment and the multinationals, a shift euphemistically described as 'economic reform' whose structural logic, as a former President of Brazil once reported it to the masters in Washington, is: 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not', which, therefore, raises contemporary India's most important *unraised* political question: What is the Indian people's alternative strategic option?

3. The economic, political and moral wreckage left behind by the collapse of the Nehruvian national project, to which the neo-liberal 'economic reform' is daily adding its own wreckage, has provided the social-material basis for all sorts of regressive ideologies and politics, including *Hindutva*, which propelled the BJP to power at Delhi. But it is mistaken to see the BJP only as a *Hindutva* or communal party. While its opponents, including the Left, impotently locked themselves up in a 'communalism-secularism' trap, the BJP merrily went on implementing the Congress-initiated 'economic reform' without much notice or objection. As a scholar, Radhika Desai, has recently pointed out:

The Indian capitalist class may be senior, practically venerable, among the bourgeoisies of the third world, and it may have benefited from liberalising economic policies under practically every administration since the late 1970s. But the NDA governments presided over such a massive dose of the most brazen and unapologetic liberalisation as to constitute a virtual rebirth of the capitalist class, sired by the BJP. Indian capitalists' new filial loyalty cannot be underestimated. The NDA oversaw a vast and

* *Mainstream*, September 8-15, 2005. This note was written sometime back as a hurried response to the letter of a friend from abroad who wanted to know how I looked at the current political situation in the country (R.S.).

ungrudging expansion of practically every sector of the urban industrial economy: finance and financial markets, the media, housing and construction, consumer durables and non-durables of every kind. Privatisation was accelerated, giving a great fillip to the stock markets; the foreign exchange regime was further liberalised; FDI and portfolio investments, including by foreign institutional investors, FIIs, flowed in. Consumer credit to finance lifestyles of international standards (indeed, better, thanks to the cheapness of domestic labour) for a small but very visible stratum of those in business and the professions was expanded and liberalised, as was the import regime. The tax burden on the rich was reduced; innumerable small quotas and restrictions on economic activity were lifted; the IT sector boomed, employing thousands of young professionals and arousing unprecedented hopes of upward mobility among thousands of others; and, not least, the objective of closer ties between India and its wealthy 'diaspora' in the metropolises was pursued by taking the first steps towards granting dual citizenship. All talk of the poor and of larger social goals was dismissed routinely as the leftover cant of yesterday's 'licence-permit raj'. It was truly a dream government for the possessing classes.

Needless to say, the effect of these measures on the whole economy were less than spectacular and, on the poor majority, positively disastrous. More than ever, the NDA governments created two nations in India, already home to some of the starkest divides between poverty and wealth. Every criticism from the Left had its counterpart in appreciation on the part of the rich, and there is no doubt about a feel-good factor among the propertied elite and foreign interests in India: in fact, an overwhelming pro-BJP sentiment.

This, of course, cost the BJP the 2004 Lok Sabha election. But it was no 'rout', as the opponent's wishful thinking tends to view it (the BJP's tally was 136 seats to 145 of the Congress). The corporate world, happy over the BJP's performance in power, is desperately hopeful about its future as a 'modern' political party, alternating with the Congress in the much longed-for two-party system in India's parliamentary democracy. The corporates can well do with its *Hindutva* and the accompanying obscurantism. Capitalism needs science and technology, but, as we know from history, capitalist classes have always needed religion and obscurantism too. The BJP's aggressive nationalist

posture could well be an advantage in the harsh competitive world of global economy and politics.

4. It is the Congress which initiated the neo-liberal 'economic reform' in 1991. Compulsions of electoral politics have forced it to take notice of its victim, the so-called *aam aadmi* ('the common man') and speak, again of economic growth with economic and social justice, etc. It now seeks 'economic reform with a human face', something which, symbolic gestures apart, is simply not possible for capitalism today, least of all for India's third-worldist capitalism. The current long-term crisis of global capitalism has compelled it to shed its 'human face' even in the advanced capitalist West—dismantling, or struggle over dismantling the welfare state has been a distinct feature of economy and politics in the advanced capitalist countries in recent decades. A return to normal or typical capitalism is in fact a major aspect of capital's current phase of globalisation as against the welfarist capitalism of the earlier period which was really a conjunctual aberration in capitalism's long history as an exploitative system.

(Some muddling along for sometime is always possible. Otherwise, structural nature of things being what it is, 'economic reform' and socio-economic justice don't go together, nor, for that matter, 'economic reform' and democracy).

Having long forgotten what India's struggle for freedom was about, and long forsaken Gandhi and Nehru except for ritualistic purposes, and now hamstrung in its pursuit of 'economic reform' by electoral compulsions and dependence on the Left Front, the Congress does not even have an ideology to speak of, much less one that represents any kind of radical opposition to the BJP. Even in matters of communalism and the accompanying obscurantism, it is not *that* different from the BJP as its leaders would have us believe and some others think, though the difference here can, on occasion, acquire a certain tactical importance. Elsewhere, in political behaviour and economic policies, there is even less to distinguish between the two. 'Lesser evil' is perhaps the only claim to legitimacy the Congress now has. In other words, unless it moves away from 'economic reformism' to recover some of its Nehruvian legacy,

the Congress is all set to be *finally* reduced to the status of just another political party of the Indian ruling classes, a Congress tweedledum to the tweedledee BJP in an ideal, albeit coalitional, two-party system of bourgeois democracy that best secures ruling class interests in the economy and politics of India—very much the way it is with the Conservatives and New Labour in Britain where *The Times* has no problem asking people to vote for New Labour, or the Republicans and Democrats in the United States where the only difference between the two, as Ralph Nader had told us, 'is the speed with which their knees hit the floor when Big Capital summons them'.

5. The third important player at the national level politics today is the CPM-led Left Front, the major Left formation in the country today. Its components have been long mired in reformist politics and have gone all the more 'realist' after the collapse of Soviet Union. More than 25 years of uninterrupted power in West Bengal notwithstanding, Indian people have yet to see it as *significantly* different from, or better than, what they see elsewhere in the country. Compromises are not recognised as compromises but celebrated as achievements, with the enemies gleefully advertising them as exemplary implementation of neo-liberal policies. The gap between professions and practice invites only ridicule in the bourgeois media which once feared and respected the Left, however weak it may have been.

Fortuitously propelled to importance at the national level, the CPM and the Left Front confront an obvious choice: an opportunity to redeem themselves or a tragic denouement of their reformist politics, which will also be a tragedy for the Indian people. They have the opportunity, as they support the Congress-led dispensation at the Centre to keep the BJP out of power and fight for the Common Minimum Programme, to define and project the Left's alternative strategic position or goal in relation to, yet independent of and beyond, these considerations and thereby recover their lost identity as a force for a radical transformation of Indian society. The tragedy will be a further loss of face and legitimacy in the company of the 'economic reformist' Congress and reversion to the infeasible,

regionally quarantined, social democratic politics, with the millstones of West Bengal and China round their neck to the cheers and jeers of capitalist roaders everywhere.

With the failure of bourgeois politics, all its post-independence variants, to deliver, the Indian people are looking for an alternative politics. The opportunity is there for a redeeming return to the basics, a consolidation of the *entire* Left—from the CPM-led Left Front to the ML parties and groups to the socialists and militant people's movements—in a shift to politics geared to a people's strategic option *in opposition* to what India's rulers have opted for.

6. A people's alternative strategic option is no longer a matter of some theory or long-term perspective. Socialism as the necessary and possible negation of capitalism is how classical Marxism defined it and with the October Revolution history put it on the agenda for our times. After the initial setback following the collapse of Soviet Union and its socialist experiment, the resumed world revolutionary process is already, again, positing socialism as the necessary and possible future for humankind. As they struggle to forge extra-electoral sanctions to defend their Bolivarian revolution against American imperialism and its local allies, the Venezuelans are speaking of building socialism of the twenty-first century. As they fight their 'People's War', struggle to win the battle of democracy and confront a US-led imperialist intervention in their country, the Maoists in Nepal seek self-reliant economic development oriented towards socialism. As the struggle against globalisation sharpens in Europe, forces are emerging, as for example in Germany, asking for new experiments in socialism. So it has to be in India where, even as they reckon with the complexities and contradictions of their millennia-old history and continent-sized economy and politics, the people face the choice: socialism or peripheralisation in the global capitalist economy. This, as I have argued all along, is not to posit socialism as achievable today or tomorrow, or even the day after for that matter, but to posit it as an alternative strategic goal, as the principle governing people's politics today, which links together their immediate, ongoing and emerging struggles in an ultimate project of

revolutionary transformation of our society, as the goal of a long transitional process, whose specifics and speed will depend upon the objective material conditions and the nature and balance of the class forces involved at each stage of the struggle for it. Immediately, it means saying 'no' to globalisation. This is not to argue for any kind of 'autarky' in economic development but to pose the issue of whether this development will be governed by *external* imperatives, those issuing from the requirements of the world capitalist market (export-led growth, etc.) and the associated consumerism of the rich, or primarily by *internal* imperatives, those flowing from an assessment of our own resources and the needs of our people.

The issue, in other words, is that of priorities: development for what and whom? Is it to satisfy the basic needs of the people or the consumerism of the elite in our society? The argument is for a pro-people socialism-oriented endogenous development process which draws on our own strengths, our domestic resources and capacities, including those of the hard working poor who still remain the most creative and productive in our society, a development which gives the common people, in both urban and rural areas, a positive stake in the economy and mobilises them for building a better society and, let me add, for the inevitable struggle against global imperialism and its local allies or partners. This has to be alternative strategic option of the Indian people.

Technological backwardness is often pressed as an argument to counter the plea for such autonomous economic development in a third world country. Here, apart from the fact that in India at least we are not that lacking in either technology or the talent for it, we need to overcome the widely prevalent fetishism of science and technology, which at times (as, for example, with Nehru and his 'temples of modern India', etc.) has even gone to the extent of expecting them to do the job of a social revolution, which they simply cannot. As with the economy so with technology, the question again is one of priorities: technology for what purpose? Once this question is asked, the argument for getting access to the most modern Western technology, via globalisation, loses much of its force. If the

purpose is to satisfy the consumerist hunger of the privileged part of our population with the most modern gadgets and designs, and the goodies of the West, then rushing into globalisation indeed makes some sense. But if the purpose or priority is to meet the needs of all the people for decent food, clothing and shelter, clean water, proper sanitation and health protection, education and cultural opportunities, and the like, then devoting scarce resources to the most modern technology is simply wasteful, because there is little in the latest technology of the West that could make a significant contribution. In fact what is most useful and relevant in technology, Western or otherwise, for improving the way of life of the masses, is widely known; moreover, most of it is already available at home and what else is needed, is obtainable in the normal course of magaged trade.

7. A socialism-oriented autonomous economic development as a strategic option for our people is premised on *politics*, that is, *people's politics* and not 'the market' commanding the economy (which, however, does not rule out an useful role for the market). If such development is necessary in the interest of our people and they have no choice but to attempt it if they would avoid peripheralisation, with the people *really in power* it is also possible. The failure of the world's first experiment in socialism notwithstanding, there is much in the socialist experience of our times to help guide this attempt and be hopeful about it: for example, in the still unparalleled achievements of the early years of the post-revolutionary societies in Russia and elsewhere despite their economic backwardness, in Cuba's heroic struggle to save the gains of its socialist revolution and build socialism, in Lenin's socialist project during the few years that he survived the October Revolution, in the achievement of the 'Mao years' in China, in Venezuela's ongoing struggle for an alternative model of development already marked by a shift from production for the world market to production for the Venezuelan people, channelling of oil revenues away from the pockets of multinationals and the local elite to building houses, hospitals and schools for the people, emphasis on 'made in Venezuela' and experiments to develop worker participation,

worker-state co-management, in state-owned enterprises (which, incidentally, rejects not only privatisation but also converting workers into small property owners in co-managed or self-managed enterprises) and so on. Socialism is not that impossible or uncharted a territory as the critics or enemies argue, and even some friends have begun to think. We can well enter it with confidence. Of course, there are no models here. As elsewhere, we have to find our own unique way of entering it, that is, make an India-specific transition to socialism.

8. Perhaps it is too much or too late to hope for the CPM and the Front led by it to make the necessary redeeming shift in their politics. It can be hopefully also argued that the Left Front does not exhaust the radical or revolutionary possibilities in the Indian political situation—and the struggle goes on. Even so, there are no certainties or inevitabilities, and no guarantees of victory here. And, as Engels said long ago, 'History is about the most cruel of all goddesses.' Marx saw capitalism, in its ultimate consequences, capable of destroying humanity. 'Socialism or barbarism' is how Rosa Luxemburg later summed up his prognosis. It is therefore quite possible that India may end up producing an India-specific barbarism of its own as part of the universal barbarism that capitalism now threatens the world with. Perhaps we have already travelled some distance along this road.

Chapter 8

What, then, is the CPM's Strategic Goal?*

An explicitly-stated strategic goal, distinct from and opposed to that of the ruling classes, and the struggle for this goal is what distinguishes revolutionary politics. It is this which gives effective meaning to the struggles of the working people, provides a purposeful direction to their political endeavours, and inspires them to 'attempt the impossible', 'to do something new'. Achieving this goal is invariably a long haul, but this has never deterred Communists from openly proclaiming and fighting for their goal.

What is involved here is our vision of a just and humane society beyond the present-day social orders—which I would still define as 'socialism' as the classical Marxist tradition viewed it. Holding on to this vision, 'Traum' Marx had called it, has been and remains integral to revolutionary politics.

Towards the end of *What Is To Be Done?*—a text which is as relevant today as ever—Lenin, in the midst of the most hard-headed and unsentimental of polemics, quoted the journalist Pisarev:

if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream... if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive... the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend

* *Mainstream*, July 21-27, 2006.

shape, then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus there would be... (for) art, science, and political endeavour... The rift between reality and dreams causes no harm if only the person dreaming believes seriously in his dream, if he attentively observes life, compares his observations with his castles in the air... and works conscientiously for the achievement of his fantasies. If there is some connection between dreams and life then all is well.

To which Lenin added:

Of this kind of dreaming there is unfortunately too little in our movement. And the people most responsible for this are those who boast of their sober senses, their "closeness" to the "concrete".

In the same text, Lenin had insisted: He, who forgets that 'the Communists support every revolutionary movement' and are for that reason obliged 'to expound and emphasise general democratic tasks before the whole people, *without for a moment concealing our socialistic convictions*', is not a Communist.

What, then, is the Leninist 'dreaming' or vision of the CPM, the strategic goal of CPM politics; and how, and how openly or explicitly do they link their current political practices to this vision or the alternative strategic goal?

This question regarding an alternative strategic goal, distinct from and opposed to that of India's major ruling class political formation, the Congress and the BJP, can be legitimately asked of every individual, group or political party in the country that claims to be communist or socialist. I have raised this question—as the Indian people's alternative strategic option in opposition to 'globalisation' or 'economic reform' that India's ruling classes have opted for—on more than one occasion in recent years, even written of it as 'contemporary India's most important *unraised* political question'. Immediately, the provocation to raise this question again the way I am doing now, is the adulation of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and his politics in West Bengal, which has become the daily staple of the bourgeois media and politicians, often in contrast to or 'disconnect' with, what they with unconcealed glee and contempt, describe as 'the rhetoric of comrades in New Delhi'. 'Poster boy of reform', 'the Prime Minister's new poster boy', regular patting on the back and exhortations to 'keep it up'—so the adulation goes on.

There are, however, a couple of other considerations too. For one, the Russian revolutionary Herzen is supposed to have said something to the effect: when the bourgeoisie begins to praise the revolutionaries, it is time for them to stop and take a look at themselves. For, obviously, the bourgeoisie could not have changed. And then there is Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee himself: 'We are Communists (but) we are not fools'. 'We have to learn the truth from the facts. We have to change, we have to reform.' So, 'we are practising capitalism.' He is warm about his 'friendship with industrialists' and does not want 'to send wrong signals to investors'. He likes and learns from China and Vietnam, but does not mention Cuba. He proclaims his freedom from 'dogmas', but does not tell us which 'dogmas' he has given up. And all this while: 'I am a Communist and I am proud of it.' Obviously, being a Communist no longer has the meaning it once had.

Our struggle for freedom was a struggle to break out of a globalisation whose structural logic meant wealth in England and poverty in India. This was a necessary, though not sufficient, condition to be able to build a better life for our people. Aware of this exploitative logic of the global capitalist market, of centuries of experience of imperialism which provides little evidence of the beneficial effect of foreign investment in countries of the third world so far as the common people are concerned, and in its own way influenced by the interim successes of the Soviet Union, the post-independence (Nehruvian) national project opted for the strategic goal of a state-led self-reliant development promising economic growth with 'equity and distributive justice' to the people. That it did not work out the way it was intended, that there was a significant degree of economic growth but not much equity or distributive justice for the people, that the project ended up building an India-specific government-supported capitalism, and that the rhetoric of 'socialistic pattern of society' only deceived the people, legitimised the statist-capitalism that was coming up, and created confusion about it as 'socialism' that persists to this day—all this, its why and how, is not my concern at the moment. The point to be noted is that passing through a series of economic

and political crises, the national project, such as it was, finally and definitively collapsed in 1991, foregrounding, once again—now in the context of the changed balance of forces in the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union—the question of strategic options for India's future economic and social development.

The post-independence national project having collapsed, 1991 onwards, India's ruling classes, through their different political formations, notably, the Congress and the BJP, have gone in for 'globalisation' as their new strategic option—a shift from the state-supported capitalism to a wholly privatised 'free market' capitalism and from self-reliance in economic development to reliance on Foreign Direct Investment and the multinationals, a shift euphemistically described as 'economic reform' whose structural logic, as a former President of Brazil once reported it to the masters in Washington, is: 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not.' (incidentally, post-independence, state intervention in the economy was deemed necessary by the then economically and politically weak, relatively underdeveloped, Indian bourgeoisie itself, which, as a major beneficiary of 'economic growth' during the Nehru era and afterwards, soon developed substantial strength of its own and grew hopeful of new avenues of profit-making at home and abroad in partnership with global capitalism. The new strategic option, therefore, can be viewed as a natural progress for the Indian bourgeoisie.)

It is not surprising that its pursuit of the new strategic option, the so-called 'economic reform', had the consequence of the Congress losing its credibility with the people and power to the BJP-led NDA. The NDA Government, now pursued the same 'economic reform' agenda, necessarily producing, in the words of a perceptive scholar, 'a feel good factor among the propertied elite and foreign interests in India' and creating 'more than ever... two nations in India, already home to some of the starkest divides between poverty and wealth'. It was 'India shining', but only for a few at the top, with the many below experiencing its structurally *other* reality. Again, it was not

surprising that the BJP lost the 2004 Lok Sabha election and its power at Delhi. Back in power on the *aam aadmi* plank, compulsions of electoral politics forcing it to take note of the victim of 'economic reform', the so-called *aam aadmi* ('the common man'), the Congress now again speaks the Nehruvian language of economic growth with equity and social justice, etc.—a Manmohan-Sonia farce, as it were, to Nehru's tragedy, to paraphrase Marx's famous observation on the caricatured re-appearance of historical phenomenon. The Congress now seeks 'economic reform with a human face', something which, symbolic gestures apart—which are already being forced on it by the supporting Left—is simply not possible for capitalism today, least of all for India's third worldist capitalism. The current long-term crisis of global capitalism has compelled it to shed its 'human face' even in the advanced capitalist West—dismantling, or struggle over dismantling the welfare state has been a distinct feature of economy and politics in the advanced capitalist countries in recent decades. In other words, 'economic reform', the strategic option of India's ruling establishment, has little to offer to the common Indian people; the much-touted 'growth rates' are no indication of human well-being in a capitalist society. Whatever be the benefits this option brings to a small section at the top, it will further polarise our society, play havoc with the lives of our common people and push them still further into a peripheralised existence within the global capitalist system. This is indeed how it has been over the past decade-and-a-half. And this is where the question of a people's alternative strategic option comes in, which in effect means the question of the CPM's (or the Left Front's) alternative strategic option or goal.

This is not to overlook the CPM's support to the Congress-led dispensation at the Centre to keep the BJP out of power, which is a fully justified position to take. For, to put it in the simplest possible terms, the BJP in power means 'economic reform' plus a blatantly communal and socially regressive politics. The Congress is equally, if not more, economic reformist and is not above playing a communal and socially regressive politics of its own. But, for good historical reasons, it allows for

the possibility, however limited, of intervening and influencing policy in the interest of the people. Hence also the validity of the CPM's fight for the Common Minimum Programme. These are still, essentially, tactical positions. The need to define and project before the people the Left's alternative strategic goal—its 'dream' or vision of a just and humane social order beyond and in opposition to what the ruling class politics offers to the Indian people—and to relate its current politics to that goal remains. And it remains missing in CPM politics, a visible absence even in the CPM's own argument in what little debate the country still has over the present and future of India. The consequent absence of an independent Left assertion in contemporary Indian politics is indeed the tragedy of the Indian Left today, a part of the larger tragedy of the Indian people at the end of sixty odd years of independence.

The struggle for an alternative strategic goal, our vision of a just and humane society in India, of course raises a host of extraordinarily complex issues of theory and practice. And achieving this goal is obviously going to be a long haul. But these can never be reasons for Communists and Socialists to abandon the struggle for this goal. This struggle, again, does not rule out mistakes, retreats, at times even departures from principles, but these need to be recognised as mistakes, retreats and departures, to be rectified at the earliest and not rationalised theoretically, least of all celebrated as any kind of success.

What then, is the CPM's strategic goal? We know what the CPM does not want, 'globalisation', 'economic reform' and all that. But what does it want in positive strategic terms, how open or public it is about this strategic goals, 'before the whole people' and 'without for a moment concealing' it, and how does it relate its current political practices at the Centre and in the States to this goal? The question has to be explicitly posed, if ever an answer is to be had. And this answer, rather the adequacy of it, remains crucially important for the future our people will have. Crucially important, because the CPM is today the country's leading Left political formation and its role is central to the

independent Left assertion in Indian politics that our people most urgently need.

But, then, perhaps, it is too late, and therefore irrelevant now to raise these issues with the CPM. Maybe the Bhattacharjee turn in CPM politics signals that the old fire gone, happily 'in poer' (rather quarantined) in its three States, the party, 'changed' and 'reformed' by its Bhattacharjees, no longer 'dreams' or thinks in Marxist or Leninist ways. 'One residual consequence of the Soviet collapse', I have noted elsewhere, 'is the sudden inhibition of social imagination'. Maybe, like so many other Coomunists and Socialists, the CPM too has gone 'realist' and finally succumbed to this inhibition. It may even be that the party does not hope of ever being in power at Delhi with its own agenda, and, unable or unwilling 'to do something new' that the situation demands, it sees its future as a pro-people pressure group at the Centre and the best manager of 'economic reform' in the States. There is plenty of room for such social democratic politics in our country today. And, as that 'most ambitious and intransigent theorisation of ultra-capitalism as a global order', Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and The Olive Tree* has sloganised: "One dare not be a globaliser today without being a social democrat"!

Sad about the situation one hopes that these 'may bes' are not yet a reality with the entire leadership of the CPM, that the party retains enough of Marxism and revolutionary commitment to keep its original promise to the Indian people.

Chapter 9

Future of Socialism*

I have been asked to speak on 'Future of Socialism'. What I am going to say is based on my recently published book, *Crisis of Socialism—Notes in Defence of a Commitment*, which may be referred to for the detailed argument in support of the propositions I am going to advance with the help of passages culled from this book. I am going to deal with the question in four separate but interrelated segments of my address.

During the heady, rebel days, in the late 1960s, students of Paris used to ask of everyone who would address them to first tell them: 'where do you speak from?' For every speaker, inescapably speaks from a particular philosophical-political standpoint and owes it to his audience to publicly state it. It is only fair to acknowledge that I am going to speak from the standpoint of Marxism, rather Marxism as I understand it. For I have no pretensions to scholarship in Marxism. I picked up some on the way and have found it useful not only in my politics or profession as a teacher, but in living my life as well. This last is not just a formal statement. Knowing Marx does make a difference to what sense you make of life, how you understand, live and act in the world. 'Indeed, I must confess that Karl Marx made a man of me', is how George Bernard Shaw once put it. Marx, therefore, is important to me and, I believe, he is important

* An address to the journal *Itihasbodh* at Allahabad on March 8, 2007.

to all of us, today more so than ever before, if for no other reason than this: the world we are living in is a capitalist world, more capitalist than ever before after the Soviet collapse, and Marx more than any other human being, then or now, devoted his life to explaining the reality of this world and his achievement here remains unrivalled. In one sense, this is what I am going to speak about, for socialism, properly understood, is a historically necessary and possible *negation of capitalism*.

I

No discussion of socialism today, least of all its future, can bypass what happened in the erstwhile Soviet Union. What we have here, as I have argued at length in my book, is a failed revolutionary experiment: a grievously deformed socialism that was built and the final crisis and collapse of the *sui generis* class exploitative system it had ultimately degenerated into—all of which is fully amenable to a Marxist explanation in terms of its method of historical materialism and class analysis. In other words, what failed in the Soviet Union was not socialism but a system that came to be built in its name. I have no time to discuss this subject here. Immediately I would only like to emphasise the need for socialists to understand the why and how, and the implications, of what happened in the erstwhile Soviet Union.

It is indeed imperative for socialists who wish for a future beyond capitalism, to understand what has happened, what was built and what has failed, the collapse of what we have described as 'actually existing socialism', and some others as 'authoritarian communism'—though they must do so fully mindful of the costs and consequences of 'actually existing capitalism' or 'authoritarian capitalism' which has rushed in to pick up the pieces. It was certainly mistaken to see the struggle for socialism in our times as a contest between 'the socialist world' and 'the capitalist world', as official Marxism in the post-1917 period made it out to be. It was, as always, an international class struggle with several more or less important fronts. The countries of 'actually existing socialism', while it lasted, were only one front of this struggle, and while they did condition or influence this struggle, positively as well as

negatively, they did not determine or settle the question of its outcome. Nor does the collapse of these countries now, or their return to the capitalist fold, in any way settle the question of the future of socialism—the struggle still goes on and will, so long as capitalism lasts. Nevertheless, these countries constituted what was in many ways a most important front of the ongoing international class struggle and their collapse demands that socialists understand and come to terms with it. If they no more need to carry the burden of a deformed and degenerated socialism or be answerable for its ugliness and cruelties, the burden of a genuine, Marxist explanation of its collapse has still to be carried by them so that our people know the truth and appropriate lessons are drawn for struggles of the future....

We need this explanation not only to learn the right and not wrong lessons from what has happened, but even more because in the absence of *our* explanation, it is *their*, the enemies' explanation which will continue to prevail, and this is: 'socialism has failed'. What is more, we need it to prevent *them* from taking *our* history from us. For the ideologues of capitalism, even as they have pronounced the 'end of socialism' and with the post-modernists even deny the ability to learn from history, are busy depicting the October Revolution and what followed, an entire era of people's heroic struggles and achievements, as nothing but a costly aberration in history. Indeed, defending or reclaiming our history is today in itself a revolutionary project for us, as part of our assessment of what has happened in the Soviet Union....

The lessons, often bitter ones, have to be drawn from the past. This is necessary to face reality and rebuild the required politics and culture on the Left. But it is equally necessary to be properly balanced about it. In other words, it also needs to be recognised that this past is not entirely a bitter heritage. Our assessment or self-accounting must not throw any baby out with the bath water....

An assessment or reassessment of the experience of Soviet Union, culminating in the collapse of history's first great experiment in socialism and of the whole communist movement

associated with it, even when not led or dominated by it, is obviously important for socialists everywhere, in the North as well as the South. But those who especially need to master the lessons of this experience are the leaders, and even more the militant cadre of the communist parties for whom Soviet Union was a decisive point of reference and identity, whatever the differences that may have emerged in the later period. In the West, unable or unwilling to find answers to the Soviet collapse and related problems from within Marxism, most of these parties have simply abandoned the socialist project and opted for the social democratic road. Elsewhere, mostly in the third world, though remaining formally communist, they are confused and disoriented by what has happened, and unable to transcend the orthodoxies of official Marxism are content to blame it all on Khrushchevite revisionism, betrayal of a Gorbachev or secret machinations of US imperialism and its CIA. Even the Marxist-Leninist communist formations, or those holding on to the old orthodoxies of Chinese vintage, have, by and large, failed to go beyond this much too simplistic and shallow understanding. Unless the opportunity is now seized to turn to authentic, creative Marxism to understand the crisis and collapse of Soviet socialism and this understanding made central to a rethinking of the whole question of the long-current reformist or ultra-left practices in the movement, the momentum of the past may keep these communist parties going, but with the old leaders and credibility born of past struggles or gains fading out and the failure of any new radical recruitment, they can only stagnate, or continue to decline down the road of economistic practices, electoralist reforms and even pragmatic adjustments within the ongoing capitalist globalisation; and the Marxist-Leninist or Maoist formations, their avowed revolutionary commitment notwithstanding, will remain the sectarian movements they are, wrangling with each other and quarantined within their limited areas of influence. Though communist in name, these parties and formations will have lost the opportunity to recover and become a politically effective force on behalf of socialism...

For socialists in the third world, including those who call

themselves communists, the Soviet experience has an added, rather exceptional importance. Classical Marxism, with its perspective of construction of socialism in advanced capitalist countries and on an international scale, had, apart from some general principles, little to say to the Russian Bolsheviks as they set out on their unanticipated journey in an entirely uncharted territory: a struggle for socialism in a single backward country, in the midst of unremitting hostility of internationally dominant capitalism led by its most advanced sectors. Theirs was a pioneering effort. Insofar as the cause of its failure lies, along with the force of objective circumstances in the inadequacies of theory and practice for this unprecedented task, the Soviet experience has invaluable lessons for revolutionaries in the third world as, like Russia, their poor and backward countries, in this period of renewed global capitalist domination, seek a better, necessarily socialist, destiny for themselves...

What has happened in the former Soviet Union does not in any way invalidate Marx's argument for the necessity and possibility of a socialist negation of capitalist social order. Only the struggle for socialism is turning out to be far more complex and difficult than he ever visualised. Socialists of course have no illusions that the struggle for socialism is going to be easy or expeditiously successful. After the first failure it will be far more difficult in many ways than before, it is going to be a long detour to socialism next time. But they have no reason to feel gloomy about the prospects either. The material conditions are more favourable and objective compulsions far stronger than appeared possible a few years ago, and the constituency for the socialist cause can only grow as capitalism shows itself increasingly incapable of coping with the crises it produces....

II

It can be legitimately argued that the reasons which in the first place gave rise to the movement for socialism still hold, more so at the beginning of this century than they did at the beginning of the last or at any time earlier. Capitalism remains a deeply exploitative and ecologically disastrous way of organising social life. Apparently triumphant, capitalism continues to operate

under the same structural compulsions, producing the same catastrophic consequences as before. It remains ridden with crises and congenitally unable to subordinate its achievements to the needs of human beings, unable, despite its prodigious productive abilities, to offer even bare survival to vast majorities in the world it dominates. Despite its current apotheosis, capitalism has resolved none of the problems which have for more than a century and a half given sustenance to socialist aspirations and struggles. The logic favouring a worldwide transition to socialism remains as compelling today as it has ever been.

The collapse in the Soviet Union does not in any way change this logic, except that the economically exploitative, morally repulsive and ecologically unsustainable character of capitalism is now more apparent than at any time in its history....

The objective conditions and more than an embryonic subjectivity at individual and mass organisational levels exist for the reconstruction of a socialist opposition to the currently dominant capitalist system. In the West the euphoria over 'no alternative' is long over. The declaration of 'the end of history', like similar declarations in the past, stands rejected as so much silliness. The long moment people thought typical, the welfarist capitalism, is recognised as not typical, typical is the harsh reality they are now experiencing. People are learning the hard way what capitalism, and about the compradorism or their own ruling elites. The question of an alternative is back on the agenda, and in different shapes and forms, in however confused or muddled a manner, anti-capitalist struggles are being resumed in different parts of the world. These struggles may not produce a remake of the previous century. History certainly has its surprise—and revolutions by the oppressed and exploited are among them....

Revolution is not only armed struggle or insurrection, though it still cannot be ruled out. It does not at all help to see revolution as a punctual moment in history or in terms of iconic images like the taking of the Winter Palace or storming of the Bastille. Revolution is best understood as a complex process—with special complexities of its own in regimes of

bourgeois democracy. And however we understand it, we cannot predict the practical and theoretical forms of the revolutions of the future. But we know the surprises that vicissitudes of world history brought us in the twentieth century. And there is no reason to doubt that this one will bring more. The inventiveness of masses in revolt has been and will continue to be beyond the imagination of the most sensitive scholar or philosopher...

Revolution is not over. The basic conflicts between classes, between the oppressed and the oppressors, between a new and the old social order will not cease because the Soviet Union has ceased to be and a Fukuyama has announced the 'end of history'. The dynamics and forces which generated the revolutions of the twentieth century remain as they were in the past. The end of 'historical communism' has not put an end to poverty or to people's thirst for justice. The poor and forsaken of the third world still hope for a better life. Not exactly enthusiastic over revolutions, past or future, Fred Halliday, in his recent study on the subject, has yet pointed to 'the enduring inability of those with power and wealth to comprehend the dept of hostility to them' and 'the ability of history... to surprise', and written: 'the agenda of the revolutions of modern history is still very much with us because the aims they asserted... are far from having been achieved.' This leaves revolution still on the agenda of history. Revolution remains the vital truth, the unfinished story of our times—in whatever shape or form and over however long a period the rest of the story may be told....

The story is in fact already being told in the resumed world revolutionary process which, after the initial setback following the failed experiment in the Soviet Union, is again positing socialism as the necessary and possible future for humankind. As they struggle to forge extra-parliamentary sanctions to defend their Bolivarian revolution against American imperialism and its local ally, the Venezuelans are speaking of building 'socialism of the twenty-first century' and, inspired by Cuba, the pink is threatening to turn red elsewhere in Latin America. Fighting their 'People's War' and now struggling to win the battle of democracy, the Maoists in Nepal seek self-

reliant development 'oriented towards socialism'. As the struggle against globalisation sharpens in the West, the *New Yorker* writes of 'The Return of Karl Marx' and in Europe voices are heard asking for new experiments in socialism. Never a narrowly conceived class project, socialism today stands poised, as never before, to be 'the movement of immense majority in the interest of immense majority' as Marx had proclaimed in the *Communist Manifesto*.

III

The collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has led any number of scholars, journalists and politicians, ideologues and writers of all sorts, to play zero sum games. If socialism has lost, then its antagonist, capitalism, must have won. If planned socialist economies have broken down, then their binary opposite, free-market capitalism must have triumphed. Apart from its utterly reductionist and adversarial and obviously questionable logic which, equating what was built in the Soviet Union with socialism as such, conflates its failure with a victory for capitalism, such an assessment of the situation is not only logically flawed, it is false on empirical grounds as well. On any objective assessment, at the end of its five centuries old existence, global capitalism is very much a failed system today. The evidence of this failure is starkly visible in every part and aspect of contemporary capitalist world. It is visible in the impoverishment and immiseration on the rise just about everywhere in the world; in the official statistics on rates of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and hunger, in the sullen slums of major cities of Western bourgeois democracies, proliferating urban ghettos of the gritty capitals of former Soviet block countries and the warrens of teeming tumbledown shanties of the peripheral South; in the gross inequalities of the world, the wretchedness of the impoverished and excluded within the rich Western societies and the huge mass of misery in the poorer countries; in the morally intolerable and socially unnecessary suffering—what Bourdieu has called *la misere du monde*—produced by capitalism everywhere...

The 'actually existing socialism'—which was not Marx's

socialism whose possibility remains open—has of course, failed. But, surely, the 'actual existing capitalism'—which is the only kind of capitalism possible—has not been the success it is made out to be. In any objective judgement, capitalism too has been a failure in our times. Other considerations apart, capitalism has been a failure in terms of possibly the most legitimate criteria for assessing the performance of a social system: 'fullness of employment' and 'goodness of employment' of the actual and potential resources available in society. Never before in human history has the gap between society's potentiality and society's performance been so immense as it is today in capitalism's current stage of development. Evidence is there in the extraordinary productive capacity that three successive industrial revolutions have put at the disposal of humankind and the poverty and illiteracy, squalid slums and homelessness that are the lot of millions of families in the wealthiest countries of the capitalist world and the hunger and misery of hundreds of millions of people, living out their empty and barren lives in the hovels of the peripheral or semi-peripheral poor countries of the third world. The third world today is indeed a monument to the failure of capitalism in our times....

As hinted above, there is a difference between the two failures that needs to be specifically noted. Socialism may have failed for the time being, but it remains the alternative if humankind would survive and hope for a safe world and life worthy of human beings. It bears repeating that the unacceptable economic, moral and ecological consequences of capitalism, its failure ranging from unemployment, poverty and inequalities to barbarisation, at home and abroad, are not aberrations of the system or 'negative' effects produced by specific circumstances or 'mistaken' policies. They are the product of capitalism's unreformable and uncontrollable systemic or structural logic, the logic of exploitation and polarisation immanent in the system itself. Therefore these 'effects' are permanent, even though they are diminished in certain phases and increased in others. They are thus essentially irremediable. In other words, the failure of capitalism in our times has a systemic or structural necessity or inevitability about

it. In contrast, there was no systemic or structural necessity about the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union. With politics commanding the economy, socialism simply has no structural logic or 'laws' similar to what market-based capitalism has. Socialism failed primarily due to the inadequacies of theory and practice, to the mistaken *choices* that the Communist parties in power made. Apropos the failure of communist regimes (and Social Democracy in Europe), Gabriel Kolko has written: 'Their consistent failure to redeem and significantly (as well as permanently) transform societies when in a position to do so is testimony to their analytic inadequacies and the grave, persistent weaknesses of their leadership and organisations. It is this reality that has marginalised both social democracy and communism in innumerable nations since 1914, providing respite through the century to capitalist classes and their allies that otherwise would never have survived socialist regimes that implemented even a small fraction of the reforms outlined in their program.' While this may be bending the stick too far the other way, the important point is that socialism's was essentially a human failure. It had nothing inevitable about it. The lessons learnt from this failure will help whenever or wherever the attempt is made next time. Socialism therefore is not just the alternative to capitalism, it remains a real choice for humankind....

Socialism as they built it in the Soviet Union has failed. Elsewhere, capitalism too has been a failure. That both socialism as we have known it and capitalism as it has existed have failed in our times suggests that we may well locate the question of 'Future of Socialism' in the problematic of epochal transitions, in this case the transition from capitalism to socialism/communism. In other words, we have a situation where the old has exhausted its positive possibilities and the new is having problems being born. Gramsci had once written, of course of a different historical juncture: 'The old is dying and the new cannot to born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'. These 'morbid symptoms' are, to a greater or lesser degree, there all over the advanced and less advanced capitalist countries today, as good an evidence as any of the

deep crisis of the capitalist civilisation, of the ultimate failure of capitalism in our times....

What we are indeed witnessing today is the end of an epoch, the epoch of transition to capitalism. Over these five hundred odd years, as capitalism expanded to structure and restructure an unequal world of core, semi-periphery and periphery regions in terms of economic strength and benefits, at each stage of this expansions, capitalism was able to overcome its permanent contradictions, but not without worsening the situation for itself for their overcoming in future. Now with the possibility of further expansion virtually exhausted, these contradictions are difficult to overcome as in the past. They are manifesting themselves all the more violently with truly disastrous consequences for the people that suggest the passing away of the epoch of capitalism's domination. Even at its best, capitalist development has been a process of 'creative destruction', to use Schumeter's famous phrase. As accumulation takes place, competition forces firms to be creative in order to survive, those firms that are not creative are destroyed. In a world of markets and competition, winners are matched by losers, and creation and destruction become one and the same. Losers, however, have not been simply impersonal firms or abstract inefficient technologies. In the real world, losers have been simply impersonal firms or abstract inefficient technologies. In the real world, losers have been people, sometimes capitalists, but always working people, individually and as communities. 'Creative destruction' has meant the unemployment of real workers, the destitution of real communities, devastation of the environment, and disempowerment of the people. The destructive aspect of capitalism's 'creative destruction' has now reached a point where the historical *raison d'être* and justification that capitalism, as a mode of production, once had, had disappeared and we can legitimately speak of capitalism living beyond its time, beyond the period of its historical legitimacy.

Capitalism's achievements are now all in the past, its future promises only disasters for humankind. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had written of class struggle ending 'either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in

the mutual ruin of the contending classes.' The great class struggles of the twentieth century have obviously not resulted in 'a revolutionary reconstitution of society'. What Marx and Engels saw as 'the common ruin of the contending classes' is already on in the world. Economies everywhere in shambles; obscene wealth alongside abject poverty and wanton waste of resources; widespread collapse of law and order; senseless regional and ethnic conflicts; new wars between or within nations almost on a daily basis; spread of weapons of mass destruction and threat of terrorism on a global scale; an all-engulfing ecological crisis—all this in fact points to the common ruin of more than the contending classes as a very realistic prospect in the historically near future. The epoch of capitalism may well end up in 'the total destruction of humanity', the possibility predicted by Marx in 1845 — a perspective that Rosa Luxemburg later summed up in the dictum: 'Socialism or barbarism'. Modifying Rosa Luxemburg's dictum in relation to the dangers we face, Meszaros has suggested adding to 'socialism or barbarism', 'barbarism if we are lucky'—in the sense that the extermination of humankind is the ultimate concomitant of capital's destructive course of development.' Such an outcome, 'the extermination of humankind' is implicit in the uncontrollable accumulative logic of capitalism. It has been rightly pointed out that the truth about capitalism today is not that it is the 'end of history', as the bourgeois ideologues want us to believe, but that its continued existence can really bring on the end of human history....

As suggested above, taking 'the longer view' of things, the present-day defeat and reversal of socialism are best viewed as part of the zigzag that the epochal transition from capitalism to socialism is bound to be....

The twentieth century opened with global capitalism's total domination of the world. Then, as anticipated by Marxian analysis, indeed by Marx himself, came the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century—the European revolutions in the aftermath of the First World War (of which only the Russian Revolution survived), in Eastern Europe after the Second World War, and then in China, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere—

taking approximately a third of the world's population and territory out of the capitalist system. Socialism does not take root and grow within the confines of capitalist society, as capitalism had done under feudalism. It is a new beginning, a society best built on the material basis provided by capitalism. But now these poor and backward countries were called upon to build socialism where this basis hardly existed. It was a task for which they were most ill prepared. Even so, as these countries struggled to build, and other revolutionary regimes and movements professed Marxism and committed to socialism emerged in Africa and elsewhere, for a long time the contest between capitalism and its post-revolutionary rival claiming to be socialist seemed to be close and of uncertain outcome. After the events of the recent past, it may be that the visible future belongs to capitalism. But such a perspective is relatively new. For most of the century, it was far from clear that capitalism would survive into the third millennium. Now it is the post-revolutionary rival claimed to be socialism that has failed even to last till the end of the second millennium. This, however, is not any end of the earlier perspective. The Soviet experiment in socialism has failed because the conditions, both objective and subjective, were most unfavourable for it. There was the initial economic backwardness, then internal class war and armed and unarmed foreign intervention, global capitalism's continuous effort to prevent any successful construction of socialism. Decisive in its own way were the factors of inadequate and often erroneous theory that guided, or misguided, this experiment and poor political leadership. But it is important to recognise that what has been tried and failed is not socialism but history's first serious effort to build socialism. The reasons that produced the cause of socialism as well as the revolutions aimed at its achievement are still very much there. There is no reason to presume that new revolutions aimed at its achievement are still very much there. There is no reason to presume that new revolutions, surprising as ever for the dominant capitalism, will no longer take place and new efforts to build socialism will not be made. And even less reason to presume that given favourable circumstances, more adequate theory and better political

leadership, such efforts will not succeed...

Here a look at capitalism's emergence and spread can be quite instructive. Scholars have pointed out that the late Middle Ages witnessed not one but several promising yet false starts for capitalism. But weak and divided, they lacked the stamina to survive in the hostile, predominantly feudal environment of the period. Smothered by surrounding feudalism, the emerging capitalism simply failed to catch on. It was not until centuries later that a new conjuncture emerged in which a budding capitalism, benefiting well from its earlier abortive appearances, could take root and grow powerful enough to fend off its enemies and survive, to finally arrive as it did in England and other Atlantic societies. Once arrived, the struggle with feudalism still continued, a struggle between two actually existing social formations for supremacy, i.e. for state power (monopoly over the means of coercion) and the right to organise society in accordance with their respective interests and ideas. Moreover, the process was a prolonged one in which the 'new' social formation had ample time to prepare itself, both economically and ideologically, for the role of undisputed dominance. It is thus that capitalism grew and developed into the globally dominant system of our times, till socialism made its first efforts to make a breach into it, an effort which has now failed...

But the failure of history's first socialist effort does not mean that more successful future efforts are impossible. The evidence of history suggests otherwise. As we have just noticed, it was only after many centuries of turmoil, though a long process of advances and retreats, that capitalism established itself as the dominant world economic system. In the centuries-long struggle between feudalism and capitalism, there were many triumphs of feudalism, but in the long run, capitalism finally prevailed. So in the case of the transition from capitalism to socialism, the struggle may continue for centuries. There have been, and undoubtedly will be, other 'triumphs of capitalism', but in the end socialism may yet prevail. By historical standards, a few centuries is not a long time and socialism has existed for only a very short time. It is certainly mistaken and premature to

superficially extrapolate from the developments of the recent, historically limited, past and speak of the ultimate failure of socialism, to take an entirely bleak view of its future prospects. It is certainly not justified to regard the Soviet effort as only a 'heroic but tragic experience', 'an abortive search for an impossible short cut', a 'parenthesis' or 'interlude' in the history of capitalism, or, as in Stefan Heym's phrase, merely a 'footnote in history', and so on. Rather dismissive in nature, such assessments tend to suggest a failure of socialism as such. On the contrary, it is far more legitimate to argue that in view of the epochal nature of the transition involved, the Soviet collapse does not mean the end of socialism but only the end of world's first large-scale attempt to transcend capitalism and build a socialist society. In the larger perspective of next century or two, the developments since the 1920s can be better understood as a disastrous but still educative false start and the current crisis of socialism as a period of temporary retreat in the epochal transition to socialism. Therefore, if we believe that capitalism needs to be negated in socialism, that the underlying ideas and ideals of socialism as a period of temporary retreat in the epochal transition to socialism. Therefore, if we believe that capitalism needs to be negated in socialism, that the underlying ideas and ideals of socialism provide the only possible framework for a decent human society, we certainly don't have to abandon hope simply because the first attempts to realise them in practice — under very difficult and unfavourable conditions, it should be noted—proved unsuccessful. We can and must still hopefully struggle for socialism and refuse to accept capitalism as the inescapable destiny for humankind. It is thus that the contest between these two approaches to human social development is still unsettled. Its outcome remains open. In a long-term historical perspective, 1917, as Goethe said of 1789, may yet mark the beginning of a new epoch in the history of humankind....

But this 'long-term' is today loaded with a problematic. Once available to capitalism to emerge, consolidate itself, and grow dominant, *time* is no longer so available to socialism—which, incidentally, also has most serious implications for the future of

humanity. The reason lies in the growing ecological crisis in the world, where the accumulative logic of capitalism now threatens the very existence of humankind on the planet, earth....

Capitalism has indeed shown remarkable resilience and survived beyond what can be described as its historical time. But its survival has now put a question mark over the future of humankind. Hobsbawm has written: 'If humanity is to have a recognisable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present. If we try to build the third millennium on that basis, we shall fail. And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness.' 'Darkness' yet does not capture the full gravity of what lies ahead. Caught in a global structural crisis, capitalism has become more creative than ever in unleashing its destructive potential. Its accumulative logic and America-led global politics are threatening humanity with unheard-of ecological disasters and nuclear exterminism. With capitalism, humanity is indeed headed for a collective suicide and destruction of the earth itself. Socialism, therefore, is not just 'a changed society', a superior social order, it is today the necessary defence of humanity and our planet earth. This in its own way makes socialism all the more possible as an alternative to capitalism. Alternatives are discovered or invented, or even recovered when it becomes clear that we cannot survive without them. So it is now with socialism. Pointing to the human tragedy that capitalism's continued existence now portends for humankind, this is how Chomsky has put it in his characteristically simple manner: 'At this stage of history, either one of two things is possible. Either the general population will take control of its own destiny and will concern itself with community interests, guided by values of solidarity, sympathy, and concern for others, or, alternatively, there will be no destiny for anyone to control.'

Years ago, the French students in their May-June uprising of 1968 expressed this sharp contrast of alternatives magnificently in their slogan: 'Be practical! Do the impossible!' Marcuse had suggested that the new generation that faces the next (that is, twenty-first) century needs to add to this demand 'the more

solemn injunction: If we don't do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable! The 'unthinkable' today is more than mere 'decent into barbarism'. What is at stake is the actual existence of the world, and with it of the human species. And the task, as ecos-feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne, paraphrasing Marx has said, is 'to change the world.... so that there can still be a world'. Socialism is precisely the changed world we need. Once a promise of liberation, socialism has now become a question of survival too. The human species needs socialism not only to realise its potentials but even to survive. That is how the chances of survival and realisation of the potentials of both human species and socialism have come to be interlinked today. Which also means that the future of socialism is as bleak or bright as that of humankind....

IV

It was Engels' adjuration to followers to 'not pick quotations from Marx or from him as if from sacred texts, but think as Marx would have thought in their place.' He had insisted that 'it was only in that sense that the word Marxist had any *raison d'être*'.....

Accordingly, I would make a few concluding observations on the question of socialism today, again with the help of passages culled from my *Crisis of Socialism — Notes in Defence of a Commitment*, which carries a detailed discussion of the issues now being touched upon.



Socialism arose in opposition to capitalism with the rise of modern capitalism itself. Marx's many-sided critique of capitalism soon provide it with a scientific theoretical basis, establishing it as socialism of our times, distinguishing it from its various other forms—some of which (Revolutionary Socialism, Petty Bourgeois Socialism, German or 'True' Socialism, Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism, Critical Utopian Socialism, etc.) Marx himself noted in the *Communist Manifesto*—forms in which it keeps reappearing from time to time. In other words, socialism came up long before the Soviet Union did, and we are socialist because of capitalism and not because of

the Soviet Union. Some of us were in fact socialist despite the Soviet Union. And socialism remains on the agenda of history so long as capitalism lasts.



For Marx socialism is essentially a negation of capitalism, a negation of its economy, politics and ethical-aesthetic values, its multiple alienations and commodification of life. These are no blueprints of socialist society of the future in Marx's social theory. His scientific method forbidding any such speculation, Marx simply refused to 'compose the music of the future'. He visualised the construction of socialism, or communist society proper, as constituting a long period of transition. But the problems of this transition were never seriously discussed or theorised by Marx.

There are only scattered references to it in different writings of Marx and Engels, concerned primarily with characteristics of socialism as a transitional society between capitalism and communism (which they regarded as the goal towards which history was moving). The most important single document of classical Marxism here, that is, on the subject of construction of a new socialist society, is Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*—really Marx's marginal notes to the programme of the German Workers Party, published by Engels after Marx's death, sixteen years after Marx wrote them. The very title is significant. The only time Marx is drawn into making a somewhat detailed, yet all too brief, comment on the subject, it is as a critique of his own party or followers in Germany for their confused and shoddy thinking over several issues, which also included that concerning the socialist society of the future—a critique distinguished for 'the ruthless severity' and 'mercilessness' typical of Marx in matters of theory. To be specifically noted here is that Marx never saw socialism, 'advanced', 'developed', or any other, as a social formation existing in its own right (as Soviet Marxism did); that would be plainly violative of its essential character as Marx defined it, that is a transition between capitalism and communism. As was common in his times, there is a certain loose usage of the term 'socialism' in Karl Marx. Quite often, he used 'socialism' and

'communism' as synonymous terms, both referring to the same kind of society, that is, a 'cooperative society' or 'association' based on 'free associated labour'. More specifically, it is what Marx called 'the first phase of communist society' which later Marxists, including Lenin, came to describe as 'socialism' (as opposed to 'communism' proper). Marx, therefore, nowhere speaks of 'socialism' as a distinct stage or social formation or of 'transition between socialism and communism'. For Marx, as the new society emerges from the capitalist society itself, the former is obviously an integral part of the same new society, being its 'first phase' only chronologically, with the specific kind of developments corresponding to it. For him, between capitalism and communism lies no stage or stages, only a transition, more or less prolonged according to circumstances, possibly a whole epoch or perhaps even more than one historical epoch. Lenin, though sharing the loose usage often equated socialism with communism, was equally explicit in speaking of 'transition period between capitalism and communism'....

I would suggest that Marx's view here is theoretically correct and politically more fruitful as against positing the transition in terms of stages such as 'new democracy', 'people's democracy', a 'revolutionary democracy', 'socialist society', etc.

That there is no fore-ordained model or blueprint of socialism or socialist transition, certainly none suitable for all countries and all times, does not mean absence of general principles that flow from the Marxist tradition, the experience gained in national liberation and social revolutionary struggles and the efforts at socialist construction so far. For this reason, a critical understanding of Marxist tradition and revolutionary struggles of the past, and an equally critical analysis of and drawing of lessons from the past experiments in socialism, even when they have failed, is more than an intellectual game; it is an urgent and practical necessity for socialists everywhere, including those in the third world, seeking a proper perspective on possible socialist transition in their countries....



Socialism, for Marx, is not merely a set of humane economic arrangements; it is an *emancipatory project*. Marx saw socialism

in its transition to communism as humankind's transition to 'the realm of freedom' which according to him lies beyond material pursuits, beyond all activity geared to economic needs. He wrote:

.... The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus *in the very nature of things* it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all modes of production.... Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by a blind power; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human power which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.

The aspirations of vision that Marx here sets forth is in fact as old as civilisation; it is there, for instance, in Plato and Aristotle, though its realisation, then and afterwards, was seen possible only for a few. Marx put more substance into this aspiration and sought its realisation for all human beings. In other words, economic activity was, throughout, deemed to have meaning only if it serves something other than itself. For Marx this is activities 'valued as an end in themselves' (as he phrased it in the *Grundrisse*), which for him is indeed 'the true measure of wealth'.....

Marx, in line with his mode of thinking, took a historical view of the growth of needs and desires of human beings as one aspect of the general development of human nature, which is also the subjective aspect of the growth of human powers and capacities. His argument is suggestive of an infinite future of creation and cultivation of 'the wealth of subjective human sensitivity', of specifically human senses, which is really the same as human nature all the time *becoming more human*. And the important point is that, for Marx, the exercise of these

naturally and historically produced specifically human senses—the sense for music and poetry, art, science and history, love, justice and compassions, and so on—constituted the very essence of a truly human appropriation of life and nature, a genuinely rich human life. That is how, in pointing out the alienating, depersonalising and dehumanising consequences of capitalism, Marx particularly focused attention on the fact that for all the glorious human senses, whose active and concrete exercise alone constitutes the true content of a genuinely rich human life, capitalism substitutes a single abstract sense, the sense for property, a particular, historically transient, substitute sense which plays havoc with human personality and plunges man, in the words of Ladislav Stoll, ‘into the terrible inner sickness of a dehumanised world’, Marx wrote: ‘In place of all these physical and mental senses there has come the sheer estrangement of all these senses—the sense of having. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world’. ‘The more you have’, said Marx, ‘the less you are’. Hence his insistence that ‘the transcendence of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes’. He spoke of communism, ‘the actual phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery’, ‘as the positive transcendence of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real *appropriation of the human* essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development’. Marx added: ‘What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of ‘Society’ as an abstraction *vis-a-vis* the individual. The individual is the social being. His life.... is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*’. Marx is an individualist in the basic sense that his ultimate vision was a society where every individual could be a fully *human* being, where, as Marx himself put it, ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’.....

Such is the fulfilment Marx’s socialism/communism seeks for humankind. As Engels expressed it, ‘it is humanity’s leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom’, the end of its ‘pre-history’ and beginning of ‘truly human history’.



For Marx, socialism is nothing inevitable, it is something to be struggled for.

Marx was no determinist, ever. Whatever determinism there is in his Marxism, is a most conditional one, which accords primacy to human praxis, to revolutionary politics. If attention was drawn to the economic-structural necessities underlying the historical processes, it was for enhancing the freedom for *praxis*, for not foreclosing but liberating human practice, for freer choices by humans, free not in some abstract or metaphysical sense, but in the only possible *human* sense of men and women choosing and acting with the fullest possible knowledge and consideration of the necessities of the objective material situation or circumstances. Such is the dialectics of freedom and necessity in Marx.....

Thus there are no inevitabilities in Marx and no guarantees of victory either; only alternatives. Even as he insisted in the *Communist Manifesto* that ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle’. Marx had immediately added that this struggle ‘each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes’. Again, he had hailed the productive achievements of capitalism—‘it has been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about’, creating ‘more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together’ (*Communist Manifesto*). But he had also pointed out not only the damage that capitalism regularly inflicts upon humans and nature but also its long-term destructive potential—‘its accumulation process’, Marx wrote in *Grundrisse*, can have ‘the consequences even for the total destruction of humanity’—a prognosis which Rosa Luxemburg later summed up as the alternative: ‘socialism or barbarism’.

Incidentally, these alternatives to socialism—the threat of ‘common ruin of the contending classes’, and ‘the total

destruction of humanity' are already a part of the reality of our world today.



For whatever reasons, which certainly included an underestimation of capitalism's productive potential and resilience, Marx gave capitalism a short lease of life, which allowed for the possibility of realising socialism as an emancipatory project, that is initiating the epochal transition this project implied. In his main theory on the subject, based on his view of the historical tendencies of advanced capitalist development in Europe, Marx visualised the necessity as well as the possibility of a transition from capitalism to socialism/communism in the countries of advanced industrial development, with their mature productive basis and proletarian presence—'Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples "all at once" and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them', is how Marx put it in *The German Ideology*. Accordingly, Marx looked forward to an early revolution in Europe—though he also recognised (in a letter to Engels in 1858): 'For us the difficult question is this: the revolution on the Continent is imminent and its character will be at once socialist; will it not be necessarily crushed in this little corner of the world, since on a much larger terrain the development of bourgeois society is still in the ascendant'. The hoped-for European revolution finally arrived in the aftermath of the first world war but it survived only in Russia, confronting Lenin and his Bolsheviks with a totally unanticipated task: attempt a socialist transition in a single backward country, a situation or possibility that was never theorised by Marx. And now, though not inevitable, the attempt has failed. History seems to have played a trick on the doctrine of Karl Marx. This trick including the failure in the Soviet Union is eminently amendable to explanation in terms of this very doctrine but more important is to note the consequent reality of the contemporary world in relation to Marx's own perspective on socialism and the struggle for socialism in our times.

Of this reality, three features need to be particularly noticed.

First, as a capitalist world, it is a world of 'overdeveloped', 'underdeveloped' or so-called 'developing' countries. The latter two categories are generally well understood but we need to take a closer look at the 'overdeveloped' countries of advanced capitalism. For one, capitalism survives and is indeed dominant today, but as noticed earlier, it remains a failed system. Other considerations apart, capitalism has been a failure in terms of possibly the most legitimate criteria for assessing the performance of a social system: 'fullness of employment' and 'goodness of employment' of the actual and potential resources available in society. Never before in human history has the gap between society's potentiality and society's performance been so immense as it is today is capitalism's current stage of development. Evidence is there, as we have already noticed, in the extraordinary productive capacity that three successive industrial revolutions have put at the disposal of humankind and the poverty and illiteracy, squalid slums and homelessness that are the lot of millions of families in the wealthiest countries of the capitalist world and the hunger and misery of hundreds of millions of people, living out their empty and barren lives in the hovels of the peripheral or semi-peripheral poor countries of the third world....

Capitalism continues to survive but this by itself, cannot be seen as an argument for the desirability, or a sign of the progressiveness of the capitalist order, much less as any sort of 'triumph' of capitalism. 'That position', says Paul Baran, 'is no more defensible than would be the view that an inability of the human body to resist tuberculosis, however caused, furnishes a proof of the harmlessness or even usefulness of that illness'....

He adds: 'The failure of an irrationally organised society to generate internal forces pressing towards and resulting in its abolition and replacement by more rational, more humane social relations results necessarily in economic stagnation, cultural decay, and a widespread sense of despondency. Such a society—even if once the most advanced in the world—loses its position of leadership, slides into the backwaters of historical development, and turns into a breeding ground of reaction

inhumanity, and obscurantism.' This is indeed the case today, not only in the United States but increasingly in the other so-called advanced societies of late capitalism....

The US leading, these societies are, in a profound sense, to a greater or lesser degree, sick societies. Concerned scholars have written of the phenomenon of 'alienation' in these societies, their citizens' growing sense of anomie and estrangement, of isolation, hostility and frustration. They are sick with these and a hundred other social and psychic ailments born of prolonged living under an essentially irrational system, sick with apathy and boredom, with 'other-directedness' and conformism, with fears, insecurities and neuroses of all kinds. Their sustained social regression is reflected as much in the reaction and obscurantism they breed, their frivolous consumption and culture of drugs, and even guns, as in the debilitating barrage of fraudulent politics, barren culture and stupefying entertainment, inspirational rackets and demoralising press, and comic books, to which their people, even otherwise ill-educated, are exposed all the time. Societies in the grip of crises which they cannot resolve, they are inevitably producing deep pathological deformations which manifest themselves variously in different places as racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ethnic or national hatred, fundamentalism and intolerance, even as plain cruelty and aggression. Poverty, unemployment and insecurity-related crimes and associated phenomena—ill health and suicides, alcoholism and drug addiction, racist discrimination and criminal violence, violence against women and child abuse, etc.—are on the rise everywhere. In many of these 'advanced' societies, marginal indigenous populations are rapidly being wiped out for one reason or another. By their very nature, profoundly immoral societies, based as they are on domination and exploitation of man by man, along with humanistic values and culture and all human relationships, even their professed moralities and principles now stand devastated by the morality and values of 'the market'. And, most significantly, there is the near-absence of ideals in these societies, of any concern for a better future to strive for, that has been the motive force of all human progress in the past. The instruments of communication

and discovery invented by their technological genius have become the means of debasing people's understanding and preventing them from looking beyond the capitalist horizon....

Indeed, the sickness of these so-called advanced societies, the spiritual disarray of the capitalist civilisation they represent, is nowhere more evident than in their cynical idealisation of capitalism as it exists and utter lack of any vision of a secure and more satisfying life beyond their 'consumerist heaven of instant gratification', a life which would be satisfactory of basic human needs—decent livelihood, knowledge, solidarity, cooperation with fellow human beings, gratification in work and freedom from toil—and provide the possibility of men and women appropriating the world with all their glorious *human* senses. It needs to be added that these societies are all the more sick societies because they need to change the existing state of affairs but are unable to generate the necessary social forces for carrying out the revolutionary change they so badly need....

The continuance of capitalism as 'sick' societies of advanced capitalist West has an important implication. In a sense socialism arrived a little before its time, attempted as it was first in Russia, a society that was not prepared to build it. The Bolsheviks had to contend with the problems of a backward, underdeveloped capitalist-feudal social order, problems which caused grave distortions and contributed to the ultimate failure of their attempt to build socialism. Those who may be called upon to build a late-arrived socialism in advanced capitalist countries will have to contend with equally difficult but *different* problems of an 'overdeveloped' capitalism—a capitalism living beyond its time as it were, beyond the period of its historical legitimacy. In other words, as with 'underdevelopment', 'overdevelopment' too poses its own unanticipated problems for the realisation of Marx's project of socialism.

Socialism, of course, remains on the agenda wherever capitalism exists, be it 'overdeveloped', 'underdeveloped', 'developing' or any other. And there is always the overarching question as to what kind of society we, as human beings, want to have. Surely it is people and not 'economic growth' or productivity that must come first in such a society. It has to be a

humane society that fosters cooperation, solidarity and respect for universal ethical values, and makes for a non-alienated, 'truly rich human life' that Marx spoke of. Of course, such a society is impossible without basic material security and need satisfaction. But to believe that you can assure need satisfaction through greed, private acquisitive drives, universal competition and strife—the values of capitalism—and yet hope for a humane society of cooperation and solidarity is utopianism of the worst kind. Subordinating humanity to economics, to imperatives of the market, capitalism commodifies life and undermines and rots away the relations between human beings which constitute societies. Its ethos of the marketplace—competition, egoism, aggression, alienation, universal venality, in short the rat race—creates a moral vacuum in which nothing counts except what the individual wants and can grab, here and now. At the end of it all, even when wants are satisfied, the people are ever more subordinated, ever less free, ever more flattened and made passive by the dictatorship of consumerism, that arbitrarily shapes values, imposing on them the heavy burden of uniformity. The values of difference, individualisation (not individualism), all-sided development of man, of human freedom itself, disappear in the marketplace which is proclaimed to be free. As human beings, people simply don't fit into capitalism, which is a quintessential market society. For a truly humane society to come into existence, capitalism has to go....

But, in view of their 'overdeveloped', 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' character, to speak of socialism in relation to these capitalist societies is not to posit socialism as achievable today or tomorrow, or even the day after, but to posit it as people's alternative strategic goal, as the principle governing people's politics which links together their immediate, ongoing and emerging struggles in an ultimate specifics and speed will depend on the objective material conditions and the nature and balance of class forces involved at each stage of the struggle.....

In other words, while expressions like 'building socialism' or 'building socialism of the 21st century' have a certain historical and political legitimacy, what is on the agenda is a *socialism-oriented development*, such that, no matter how slow or

halting or contradictions-laden, it is a development away from capitalism and the imperatives of its market and *towards* Marx's emancipatory vision of socialism, which, in any case, was visualised as a transition spanning an entire epoch even more than one epoch.

This, again, is not to suggest any 'model' of socialist politics. Just as there is no single or foreordained model of socialism, one that is suitable for all climes and all times, there is none of socialist politics either. The specific conditions or demands and the forms of struggle they generated will vary from country to country. Which however, does not mean the absence of general principles to guide it that flow from the Marxist tradition and the experience gained in social revolutionary and national liberation struggles. The recovery of these principles is in fact a must for any successful pursuit of socialist politics today....

Second, since global capitalism is nationally organised and immediately dependent on national states, national economies and national states remain the primary terrain of anti-capitalist organisation and struggle. Of course, an international perspective, working people's solidarity across national frontiers, remains vital to any socialist movement. And today there exists a focus for such solidarity as has, perhaps, never before existed in the history of capitalism. The universalisation of capitalism has not brought about the cessation but instead the universalisation of struggle against capitalism. When, with globalisation, just about every state is following the same destructive logic, domestic struggles against that common logic can be the basis—in fact the strongest possible basis—of a new internationalism. But looking for that internationalism must not be an excuse for giving up on local national struggles. The main arenas of struggle against global capitalism still remain local and national. 'Workers of all countries, unite' remains the motto but this 'unity' obviously begins at home. There is a growing space for common transnational struggles, but the established order has still to be primarily fought on our own home pitch. As the *Manifesto* put it a long time ago: 'the proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.' If the historical experience of more than a century

since the Paris Commune is any guide this is exactly how it has been. The world revolutionary process has turned out to be extremely uneven and has moved from country to country.....

In other words, the nation state is indeed the concrete terrain on which the struggle for the radical transformation of society must begin and may have to be carried forward. It may be added that to argue that a nation state—and this includes states of the size and resources of Britain, France or Italy, or for that matter, India, China or Russia—cannot provide the ground on which the radical transformation of society can be attempted is to rule out such a transition for the forthcoming historical period. It is to abdicate the struggle for socialism in our time.....

Third, it was Marx's prognosis that capitalism in its ultimate consequences could spell even 'the total destruction of humanity'. But, giving capitalism a short lease of life, Marx never explored this distant possibility. The distant possibility is now an imminent threat hanging over the future of humankind. As noted earlier, Rosa Luxemburg had summed up Marx's prognosis in her famous poser 'socialism or barbarism'. Capitalism living beyond its historical time indeed spells a future of barbarism for humankind. It could be a nuclear holocaust that its politics has threatened for more than half a century of the almost certain ecological disaster which—noise over so-called 'sustainable development' notwithstanding—capitalism's accumulative logic now portends. This makes the struggle for socialism all the more imperative and urgent today.



It can be legitimately argued, without any underestimation of the prospects of socialist renewal in the advanced capitalist West or the erstwhile 'socialist world', that it is the countries of the third world which are likely to be the storm centres of such struggle, keeping socialism still on the agenda for the future of humankind. For the simple reason that they have no other choice, the common people there have no future otherwise. For the same reasons as in the past, the world revolutionary process is more likely to proceed through the backward, 'less developed' or 'developing' countries of the periphery and semi-periphery of the world capitalist system....

Therefore, a couple of additional observations on the question of struggle for socialism in these countries will not be out of place.

As a result of the unequal development in capitalist expansion, for causes that are neither local nor conjunctural but systemic and structural to capitalism as a world system, socialist revolutions or revolutionary movements of our time have appeared most often not at the centre but at the periphery of world capitalism—in Russia, China, Cuba, Indo-China, or in the name of socialism, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. For this is indeed where the worst victims of global capitalism's irrationality and exploitation are to be found, and therefore from where the challenge to capitalism emanated. The collapse of the Soviet Union does not end or modify the structural logic of global capitalism as manifested in poverty, underdevelopment, deindustrialisation and exploitation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It has only made global capitalism all the more powerful and given a new edge to its predatory logic. Any social system built on inequality in the command of human and natural resources works in many ways to reproduce itself and to increase the extent of the in-built inequality. So does capitalism. But as a market-governed system, capitalism carries this process to the extremes. The law of accumulation of capital inexorably produces, reproduces, and enhances inequality—wealth at one end and poverty at the other, not only within countries but on a world scale. And this is precisely what *globalisation*—another of the currently fashionable, reality-obscuring buzzwords—does. It has only sharpened the global capitalism's contradiction between its developed centre and exploited periphery. But this, if the past is any guide, also makes this periphery, the third world of the worst victims of contemporary capitalism, the site of revolts, of new countrywide challenges to the global capitalist order, of the resumed struggle for socialism.....

This, as mentioned earlier, is not to posit socialism as achievable today or tomorrow, or even the day after, but to posit it as people's alternative strategic goal, as the principle governing people's politics which links together their

immediate, ongoing and emerging struggles in an ultimate project of revolutionary transformation of society, as the goal of a long transitional process whose specifics and speed will depend on the objective material conditions and the nature and balance of class forces involved at each stage of the struggle for the socialist goal. Immediately it means saying 'no' to globalisation, a 'delinking' from the global capitalist market—which however does not mean any kind of 'autarky'—and opting for a pro-people socialism-oriented autonomous development, one governed not by external imperatives, those flowing from the requirements of the world capitalist market (export-led growth, etc.) and the associated consumerism of the rich, but primarily by *internal* imperatives, those flowing from an assessment of country's own resources and the needs of its people. Development which can meet the material needs of the people in the third world is impossible within the framework of capitalism, national or globalised. Socialism has to be the strategic goal, whatever be the long or short transitional route to it. Historical experience allows no other choice....

Any attempt at saying 'no' to globalisation or 'delinking' is likely to exact a heavy price in many ways, including an unavoidable trade-off between the requirements of productivity and those of minimising the polarising impact of global capitalism's enormous economic power. But once 'productivism' is abandoned and human welfare has the priority, this need not be a deterrent to adopting the strategy that 'delinking' involves. The details of economic policies in pursuit of this strategy will obviously vary from country to country. Here only a few broadly suggestive observations can be made....

This strategy postulates a revolutionary state, representative of a popular front of workers and peasants, undertaking at the very outset a comprehensive programme of eradication of mass poverty, universal primary education, healthcare, housing, and provision of basic necessities for all. Initiating steps towards redistribution of incomes and development of backward areas will be a priority for state's active intervention in the economy which, even as it covers such areas as foreign relations, production and social distribution, research and training, and

the like, will need to secure an effective transitional combination of planning and market forces without letting the market or its values take over. Agrarian revolution benefiting the rural proletariat and small farmers, thereby improving the productive capacity in the rural areas, and laying the basis of cooperative effort and voluntary collectivisation of agriculture should be high on its agenda of economic reconstruction, as should be the transformation of the informal sector into a popularly managed transitional economy. A building up or restructuring of industry is obviously necessary. But it can neither be one based on 'international competitiveness' (that is promoting exports through low costs of local labour) nor on 'import substitution' (promoting production for the consumption of the privileged local classes). Not that all effort in these directions is ruled out; some of it may even be necessary. Only priorities, for years to come, lie elsewhere. The important thing is to develop and organise productive forces in a manner that helps the rural sector leap forward, carries industrialisation to the countryside and in general ensures a pattern of growth which, refusing the wasteful production to satisfy elite consumerism, immediately benefits the popular masses, satisfying their basic needs, needs created and satisfiable by the redistribution of income. It should be obvious that the overall development of a third world country today cannot support the first world consumption levels of its elites. What is needed is a diversification and development of internal markets for domestic goods and services governed by the overall principle that, beyond a certain necessary priority charges of an unequal nature, private needs and wants should be satisfied (and this goes for their increasing satisfaction) only at a level at which they can be satisfied for all, and beyond this all increase in the production of consumer goods should be for collective consumption....

Such a socialism oriented pro-people endogenous development process will draw on its own strengths and domestic resources and capacities, including those of the hardworking poor who yet remain the most creative and productive force in society. It will give the common people, an overwhelming mass of workers and peasants, a positive stake

in the economy and mobilise them for building a better society as well as for the inevitable struggle against global imperialism and its local allies or partners—an awakened and aroused people are indeed the best defence even against armed aggression. Needless to add, such popular mobilisation and struggle will be all the time necessary to carry through the strategic option that socialism-oriented delinking involves....

What the above strategy in effect demands is that not economics but politics, that is class politics, is put in command of the economy. 'Politics in command' means posing such questions as: growth? but which growth? for what purpose? for whose sake, whose benefit or profit? for what kind of society and within which environment? These are questions which are central to any search for a real alternative to capitalism, vital for the very survival of socialist movement today. They are all the more vital to pose in the third world suffering the worst ravages of capitalism. We must ask: is our goal meeting 'the needs of the economy', its 'anonymous masters' as they have been called—'abstractions such as financial markets, interest rates, exchange rates, commodity prices, indexes and statistical artefacts of all kinds'—or satisfaction of the needs of the people, allowing citizens the possibility of living as human beings? Is the starting point of our economic exercises to be calculation of deficits in order to cut them at the cost of the people or a determination of resources needed to satisfy people's needs in order to find or raise them? And our language? Do we practise the obscurantism of GDP, fiscal and revenue deficits, balance or payments, growth rates, etc., or speak more humanely in terms of such things as food and clean drinking water, health care and sanitation, housing and education, etc. so that economy becomes a transparent and accountable means of integrating these basic human needs of the people with a planned use of domestic resources, an use which also takes care of questions of equality, social justice including gender justice, employment, ecologically sustainable development, etc.?...

Economic and technological backwardness is often pressed as an argument to counter the plea for such autonomous economic development. (Getting access to the most modern

technology is another usual argument for the need to actively participate in world trade). This calls for two very brief observations. In the first place it is useful to recognise that if, despite economic backwardness, the priority is given to the needs of the poorest and most deprived sections of the people, there is much that can be done at the outset even in absence of growth of productive forces. The redistribution of wealth and the use of idle or under-utilised human and material resources, their more productive deployment, can bring quick improvement in health, education and general living conditions of large masses of people. Early years of post-revolutionary societies in the Soviet Union and elsewhere provide ample evidence of this achievement which could be the basis for further development along socialist lines.

In the second place, once we overcome the fetishism of science and technology—which attributes to them properties or power they do not possess, and at times even expects them to do the job of a social revolution which they simply cannot—and, as with economic development so with technology, ask the basic question: 'technology for what purpose?', the argument for getting access to the most modern Western technology via globalisation—even if that was certain which it most certainly is not—loses much of its force. If the purpose is to satisfy the consumerist hunger of the privileged part of the population and therefore supply it with the most modern gadgets, designs, and goodies of the West, then rushing into globalisation is indeed understandable. But if the purpose or priority is to meet the needs of all the people for decent food, clothing and shelter, clean water, proper sanitation and health protection, education and cultural opportunities and the like, then devoting scarce resources to the most modern technology will be only wasteful because there is little in the latest technology of the West that would make a significant contribution. Infact what is most useful and relevant in technology, western or otherwise, for improving the way of life of the masses is widely known. Most of this technology is already available at home and what else is needed is obtainable in the normal course of managed trade....



My observations so far are directly or indirectly relevant to the struggle for socialism in India. But, exemplified by the crises of CPM politics in West Bengal, the issue of this struggle has also come up, in a *sui generis* form, at the level of state politics in India which calls for a brief discussion in its own right.

Our struggle for freedom was a struggle to break out of a globalisation whose structural logic meant wealth in England and poverty in India. This was a necessary, though not sufficient, condition to be able to build a better life for our people. Aware of this exploitative logic of the global capitalist market, of centuries of experience of imperialism which provides little evidence of the beneficial effect of foreign investment in countries of the third world so far as the common people are concerned, and in its own way influenced by the interim successes of the Soviet Union, the post-independence (Nehruvian) national project opted for the strategic goal of a state-led self-reliant development promising economic growth with 'equity and distributive justice' to the people. For understandable reasons, it did not work out as Nehru had intended. There was a degree of economic growth but not much equity or distributive justice for the people and the project ended up building an India-specific government-supported third worldist capitalism. The rhetoric of 'socialistic pattern of society' only deceived the people, legitimised the statist capitalism that was coming up and created confusion about it as 'socialism' so that when, passing through a series of economic and political crises mid-1960s onward, the project finally collapsed in 1991, it was, and continues to be, misinterpreted as the failure of socialism in India.

The post-independence national project having collapse, 1991 onwards, India's ruling classes, through their different political formations, notably, the Congress and the BJP, have gone in for 'globalisation' as their new strategic option—a shift from the state-supported capitalism to a wholly privatised 'free market' capitalism and from self-reliance in economic development to reliance on Foreign Direct Investment and the multinationals, a shift euphemistically described as 'economic reforms' which has little to offer to the common Indian people.

The much-touted 'growth rates' are no indication of general well-being in a capitalist society and the so-called 'trickle down', if and when it occurs, is no better than feeding horses with oats so that something passes down to the road for the sparrows, as Galbraith once described it. Over the past decade-and-a-half or so, whatever be the benefits 'economic reforms' has brought to a small section at the top, it has further polarised our society, played havoc with the lives of our common people and pushed them still further into a peripheralised existence within the global capitalist system.

This is nothing surprising. 'Economic reforms' is only a euphemism for capitalist development whose structural logic, as a former President of Brazil once reported it to the masters in Washington, is: 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not.' A market-governed economic growth simply cannot deliver 'inclusive growth', to use another of the proliferating buzz words of our time. Instead, it is by its very nature exclusionary, and the logic of the market, with its inevitable winners and losers, only makes for 'the secession of the successful', as the economist Robert Reich once phrased it. One look at their economic policies or concerns, their lifestyles and values will reveal how far 'the successful' of India's marketplace have already 'seceded' from the vast majority of their supposedly 'unsuccessful' fellow countryman.

Pointing out that 'the unprecedented high economic growth on which privileged India prides itself is a measure of the high speed at which India of privilege is distancing itself from the India of crushing poverty (and that) the higher the rate of economic growth along this pattern becomes, the greater would be the underdevelopment of India', Amit Bhaduri has written: 'Destruction of livelihoods and displacement of the poor in the name of industrialization, big dams of power generation and irrigation, corporatisation of agriculture despite farmers' suicides, modernization and beautification of our cities by demolishing slums are showing everyday how development can turn perverse.... The devil in angel's guise would soon appear when large populations in rural India would be rendered landless, jobless, homeless, incomeless, rootless and displaced

making way for gragantuan SEZs, the so-called epitomes of economic development.'

This raises what I have elsewhere described as 'contemporary India's most important *unraised* political question', the question of a people's strategic option, an alternative path of development distinct from and in opposition to that of India's ruling classes. The absence of this option, an alternative path of development, which can only be a socialism-oriented autonomous development, is the tragedy of the Left in India, part of the larger tragedy of the Indian people today.

And this is where lie the roots of the current crisis or tragedy of the CPM politics in West Bengal. That is how, despite its 30 odd years of uninterrupted power in the state, the CPM has not been able to project the image of doing something *significantly* different from or better than what is happening in other states; instead, operating on the terrain of bourgeois politics, responding to issues it presents and accepting the choice it offers, has entailed a corruption of consciousness and loss of revolutionary commitment. Criticism of bourgeois parties for failing by their own standards and programmes—a staple of parliamentary politics—has led to the CPM endorsing these standards and programmes itself so that its own original concerns have come to be given a go-by. And now, to the adulation of the corporate world and ridicule of the bourgeois media, West Bengal, like the other states, often in competition with them, has chosen to tread the centre-decreed neo-liberal, that is capitalist path of development. Left rhetoric apart, the only difference is that, possibly because the communists, unlike others, take theory—no matter what it is—seriously, their government alone, in its pursuit of this path (its corporate-led industrialisation and Special Economic Zones) has gone in for a shooting spree against the people!

The best of official defence is in terms of 'the role of a Left-ruled state government in a situation when the Centre has embraced neo-liberal polities'; 'The state governments', we are told, 'function within severe constraints. The simplistic notion that the West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura governments can adopt an alternative model to the Centre's policies has to be dispelled.'

At its worst there is unqualified justification and advocacy of neo-liberal policies, the corporate-ed industrialisation and Special Economic Zones. As this 'defence' is repeated by one Party leader or ideologue after another, one is reminded of the 'secondary illiterates' that poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger has spoken of—those who had the benefit of literacy once and come to know a few things, know them to be true, but now, gone illiterate, have forgotten whatever they once knew. (The tribe of 'secondary illiterates', in a truly rich variety, is growing and prospering outside the CPM too, if the media, especially TV, its talk shows, 'debates' and 'big fights' are any indication).

Capitalism is today so powerful and pervasive as to have become invisible, and it is all the more powerful for being invisible. You no longer see or recognise it, even refer to by its proper name. Thus it is 'globalisation', 'neo-liberalism' or 'liberalisation', 'structural adjustment', 'new economic policy', 'economic reforms' (and now with the CPM joining in) 'industrialisation', 'development and progress', even 'civilisation'—that is anything but capitalism. If you cannot even *see or think* capitalism you obviously cannot argue or act against it. And it capitalism is not recognised, its negation, socialism too disappears from your theory and practice. CPM leaders no longer speak in the language of socialism or class politics, not in public at least, not even when bourgeois ideologues of TV anchors get provocatively aggressive. And on the rare occasions they refer to Marxism, only vulgarise it. Here is a gem of a vulgarisation from Budhadeb Bhattacharjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal: 'From agriculture to industry, from villages to cities, this is civilisation. We Marxists never deny this aim. We too want this to happen'. One again recalls Hans Magnus Enzensberger. This time his moving short poem, *Karl Heinrich Marx*:

I see you betrayed
by your disciples
only your enemies
remained what they were.

Let me cut this dismal story short and speak of what the situation demands and what needs to be done. The situation demands that we return to calling things by their proper names and that

right questions be asked if right answers are to be had. In other words, 'economic reforms' has a proper name, capitalist development, which, therefore, has to be rejected by communists or socialists at both national and state or local levels; and the question to be asked is: what can be done and what should not be done in West Bengal in the light of socialist principles? The need is to mobilise all the available resources within and without the Left parties to work out an answer to this question, that is, a programme of possible alternative socialism-oriented policies for the state. The resources are there, among them the Left's own mass base and organisations, the state's revolutionary traditions, a significant section of supportive intelligentsia and what Victor G. Kiernan has called 'mankind's moral reserves, its accumulation of moral capital', which socialism as an ideal can legitimately claim for itself and bank on. Socialism today, more than ever before has the potential to be 'a movement of immense majority in the interest of immense majority' as *Communist Manifesto* had proclaimed. Whole areas—education, healthcare, people's empowerment, ethical governance, environment, the closed down or locked out factories in urban areas, the stalled land reforms in rural areas and poverty and hunger in both places—are crying out for possible socialism-oriented initiatives in the state. The question is really of priorities, of putting politics, that is class politics in command and making socialism-inspired choices. The CPM itself could do with some socialism-inspired rectification.

It is not for me to suggest any concrete policies. This is best done by the people of West Bengal, its workers, peasants and the allied intelligentsia. I will only share a few general considerations. Primarily relevant at the national level, these considerations are not without their relevance for policies at the state or local levels.

The concept of 'development' is by nature ideological, suggestive of something desirable, involving 'the overarching question' I have raised and answered earlier, as to what kind of society we as human beings want to have. And the answer holds even for our poor and backward people. With its subordination of humanity to economy, and the consequent commodification

of life, its ethos of greed, private acquisitive drives, egoism and aggression, competition and strife, in short rat race, its 'pseudo-moral principles', as Keynes once put it, 'which have hag-ridden us for 200 years (and) by which we have exalted some of the most distasteful of human qualities into the position of the highest virtues', and its production process which, as Marx said, turns worker into 'an automatic motor of a fractional operation' and 'cripples his body and mind', capitalist society is not the society we want to have. However poor or backward today, we need to *move away* from capitalism-oriented development and, however slowly or falteringly, *move towards* building a humane, socialist society, that fosters equality, cooperation, solidarity and respect for universal ethical values.

Again, 'development' is not synonymous with capitalist development, nor industrialisation ipso facto industrialisation sponsored by the private sector, corporate or any other. Nor is it that industrial activities are a natural monopoly of private entities, domestic or foreign. These are all ideology-determined positions, bearing witness to the hegemonic control of bourgeois ideology in our society these days. Historical experience makes it abundantly clear that paths of development other than the capitalist path are possible and there can be varieties of ways of industrialisation. For example, under the aegis of public or cooperative sectors, or as 'a programme of decentralised, employment intensive rural industrialisation through participatory democracy at the local level'.

The public sector *by itself* has no socialist implications. But it remains a serious industrialisation and employment option. Leave aside its successes elsewhere, even in India, the public sector has not been the kind of failure bourgeois ideologues make it out to be. There are, 'the stunning achievements of the National Thermal Power Corporation, Bharate Heavy Electricals, Nalco, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission, the Gas Authority of India or the Indian Oil Corporation' as a knowledgeable scholar has recently pointed out. And even the failure of public sector in India, such as it has been, is better understood as the failure of Indian democracy whence alone correctives to its malfunctioning or failure could have come,

unlike the private sector where correctives come from the market, though often needing to be backed by the state. Therefore, the answer to this failure is a differently working democracy, an effective exercise of people's power in the state, and not a market-based private sector with its record of now well established worse failures.

As for corporate-led industrialisation being an answer to the problem of unemployment, such industrialisation generally does not generate much employment. Even as it simultaneously destroys employment in activities supplanted by it and its offshoots, its primary concern with profit-making involves cutting costs including labour costs. It is indeed an illusion that corporate industrialisation with its labour-saving automated technologies can ever generate net employment opportunities. As to the promise of 'indirect' employment created in the wake of industry, it has been well-described as 'a pie in the sky for the peasants'. Above and beyond all this is the overarching issue of the *quantity and even more quality of employment* in this age of globalisation, with its 'jobless growth', ruthless competition in the markets at home and abroad, and vast masses of our people reduced to be 'the reserve army of labour' for national and global capitalism.

Yet again: that the initial modern economic and industrial development, that in the west, occurred in the capitalist form is no reason to believe that this is the only way it can take place. Marx, who studied and theorised this development, certainly did not think so. In his now well-known letter to the editorial board of the Russian periodical, *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*, in response to a critic, 'honouring me too much' as he said, Marx specifically disowned any claims of having provided a 'master key' or 'universal passport' of 'a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical'. Rejecting the very notion of such a theory, he insisted that Capital contained 'my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western-Europe' and it must not be metamorphosed into 'an historic-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself.'.....

Later, apropos of the possible historical options for Russia, Marx wrote of 'the finest chance ever offered by history to a people' to pass directly from a feudal to a communist phase of development. Marx believed that it could, provided there was an early revolution in Russia, early enough to save the peasant commune from being destroyed. Marx specifically distanced himself from his 'disciples' in Russia, Plekhanov and others, whose strictly evolutionist Marxism saw history as constituted by necessary stages and postulated the necessity of a capitalist stage in Russia's advance to socialism. Marx found their doctrines 'boring' and referred to them derisively as 'Russian capitalism admirers'. Marx's position also involved a new recognition of the great revolutionary potential of the peasantry.....

I may add that historical experience of construction of socialism in the Soviet Union, during the Mao years in China and now in Cuba, more than validates the view that economic development including industrialisation along other than the capitalist path is possible.

I would here also like to reproduce a couple of passages from Marx and Engels which are in their own way relevant to the context of the issue under discussion. The passages from Marx relate to the Marxist concept of 'primitive accumulation of capital.'

The capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realise their labour... a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage labourers. This historical process... appears as primitive, because it form the pre-historic stage of capital....

Most basic in this process are

those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and 'unattached' proletarians on the labour market... law itself becomes... the instrument of the theft of the people's land... The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods.

The passage from Engels deals with the question of 'small peasantry':

What, then, is our attitude towards the small peasantry? How shall we have to deal with it on the day of our accession to power?... we foresee the inevitable doom of the small peasant, but it is not our mission to hasten it by any interference on our part.

Secondly, it is just as evident that when we are in possession of state power, we shall not even think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (regardless of whether with or without compensation), as we shall have to do in the case of the big landowners. Our task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and private possession to cooperative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose...

We, of course, are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the cooperative should he decide to do so, and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision.

We do this not only because we consider the small peasant living by his own labour as virtually belonging to us, but also in the direct interest of the Party. The greater the number of peasants whom we can save from being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished.

Worker-peasant alliance was always at the core of revolutionary politics in Marx and Lenin.

Finally, there is the consideration that backwardness, such as there is, is not without its advantages. To put it most briefly, we can learn from the past experience with economic development, avoid its negative consequences, for example, the damage that capitalist development regularly inflicts upon human beings and natural environment. We can avoid the supposedly Marxist fascination with 'development of productive forces' that characterised the erstwhile 'socialist' economies and the obsession with 'economic growth' that plagues a capitalist economy. We can better negotiate the

necessary trade-offs between economic development and social justice, between requirements of productivity or efficiency and environmental sustainability or quality life which is not entirely a matter of material progress or economic growth. In other words, our backwardness gives us the opportunity 'to do something new', the all-important option of a path of development which, subordinating economy to humanity, plans and develops it in a way that is, in Marx's word, 'worthy of our human nature.'

To conclude: it is simply inconceivable that there can ever be a situation where socialist principles do not indicate what can be done and what should not be done in the light of these principles. With politics, that is class politics in command, socialism-oriented initiatives are indeed possible at the state and local levels in the Left-ruled states. The need is for the CPM to mobilise all the resources within and without the Left parties to work out an alternative path of development geared to the strategic goal of socialism, implement whatever part of it is implementable at the state and local levels in the states where the Left is in power, and mobilise the people elsewhere for it with primacy given to extra-parliamentary struggles. This will make the Left-ruled states an example for the rest of the country and help the Party and the Left to rally all the radical forces in the country—NAPM, ultra-Left formations, militant NGOs, etc.—to emerge as a genuine and effective alternative to the ruling class class politics at the centre, with its own agenda of pro-people, self-reliant socialism-oriented development for the country. Of course, it is going to be a long haul and we don't have to mix up our own mortality with a time-table for the achievement of socialist goals.

But then, perhaps, it is too much or too late for the CPM to make a principled Marxist response to the situation it faces.

Some time back, in a critical comment on CPM's lack of a strategic goal, distinct from and opposed to that of the ruling classes, and its pursuit of neo-liberal policies in West Bengal, I had written:

Maybe the Bhattacharjee turn in CPM politics signals that the old fire gone, happily 'in power' (rather quarantined) in its three States,

the party, 'changes' and 'reformed' by its Bhattacharjees, no longer 'dreams' or thinks in Marxist or Leninist ways. 'One residual consequence of the Soviet collapse', I have noted elsewhere, 'is the sudden inhibition of social imagination.' May be, like so many other Communists and Socialists, the CPM too has gone 'realist' and finally succumbed to this inhibition. It may even be that the party does not hope of ever being in power at Delhi with its own agenda, and, unable or unwilling 'to do something new' that the situation demands, it sees its future as a pro-people pressure group at the Centre and the best manager of 'economic reforms' in the States. There is plenty of room for such social democratic politics in our country today. And, as that 'most ambitious and intransigent theorisation of ultra-capitalism as a global order', Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* has sloganised: 'one dare not be a globaliser today without being a social democrat'!

But I had then added:

Sad about the situation one hopes that these 'may bes' are not yet a reality with the entire leadership of the CPM, that the party retains enough of Marxism and revolutionary commitment to keep its original promise to the India people.

Today, while sadness persists and hope has continued to dwindle, a possibility threatens which critics on the Left, including the ultra-Left, themselves unable to develop a genuine alternative to ruling class economics and politics, need to take serious note of. The policies and politics currently pursued by the CPM in West Bengal may well lead to its disintegration and decline as any kind of Left force in Indian politics. And this will be yet another tragedy for our long-suffering people.

Chapter 10

On Violence and the Question of Means and Ends*

I must confess that I have nothing much to say about 'Emerging Trends of Violence in North-West India'. I simply lack the requisite knowledge. As I see it, developments in recent years, particularly the economic policies and politics pursued by the ruling classes in India, have sharpened all the divides and fissures, failures and faultlines of Indian society, leading to new or increased violence in the country as a whole, which is often subsumed under what America's imperialist politics has come to describe as 'terrorism'—an omnibus concept that ruling establishments everywhere are lapping up as an ideological device that helps them escape responsibility for the diversely specific forms of violence engendered by their policies and politics. However, the organizers have, very rightly in my opinion, posited a very wide framework of discussion, with sub-themes and symposia touching on issues ranging from 'theoretical perspectives' to 'Gandhi and Non-Violence'. This allows me to make a few very general observations, including a brief comment on Gandhian non-violence and the question of means and ends.

Among the excitingly significant slogans and practices of the

* Inaugural Address to the Conference on 'Emerging Trends of Violence in North-West India' at Punjabi University, Patiala, on November 5, 2007

rebel students of Paris in the late 1960s was one where they used to ask of everyone who would address them to first tell them: 'Where do you speak from?' For every speaker inescapably speaks from a particular philosophical-political standpoint and owes it to his audience to publicly state it. It is only fair to acknowledge that I am going to speak from the standpoint of Marxism, rather Marxism as I understand it. For I have no pretensions to scholarship in Marxism. I picked up some on the way and have found it useful not only in my politics, or profession as a teacher, but in living my life as well. This last is not just a formal statement. Knowing Marx does make a difference to what sense you make of life, how you understand, live and act in the world. 'Indeed, I must confess that Karl Marx made a man of me', is how George Bernard Shaw once put it.

I shall be making my observations occasionally with the help of what I have said or written elsewhere.



Violence in our society, for that matter anywhere else in the world, is a social, conjuncturally produced phenomenon. It is not something inherent in human nature, as conservative thinking generally has it. Violence is far more repugnant to human nature than consistent with it. Human beings in fact have a natural aversion to violence, natural not in any transcendental sense, validated by the charms of abstract ideals or some superhuman source or authority, but in the same sense in which our moral principles or ideals are natural to human beings, produced and ordained by them in response to social needs, above all their need for a humane social existence. Human nature, a product of our interacting biological and sociological inheritances, is essentially modifiable and has been changing from one epoch to another. And this changing, reflected in the growth of our moral principles, ideals or values, has also meant human nature all the time becoming more *human*. That is how human beings' aversion to violence is a moral principle that needs to be respected, above all by revolutionary politics, though, it must be added, this does not exhaust the question of violence for it.



As a social scientific enterprise, the study of violence in modern societies posits a host of difficult problems. Immediately I would like to share two very general considerations in this regard.

The covering note for this conference speaks of 'violence in modern democratic societies'. This is an ideologically-loaded misdescription of things, which is quite common in contemporary social science literature. For what we have here is, at best, more or less democratic political systems and not democratic societies—a fact that was well noted for America's 'modern society' by the American Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandies a long time back. He had said: 'We can have a democratic society or we can have the concentration of great wealth in the hands of the few. We cannot have both'. In other words, 'democratic politics' notwithstanding, what we are dealing with are essentially undemocratic societies—class divided, unequal and exploitative, more or less iniquitous and oppressive. It is an important aspect of the undemocratic nature of these societies that some of the worst forms of violence in the world today is generated by their very structure and by the interests, policies and politics of those who are dominant in these societies. Hence there is a strong social pressure of the established dominant elites, the beneficiaries of the present organisation of society, to prevent a truthful understanding of violence in their societies. The problem here was well-stated by the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, way back in the 17th century. Pointing to the risky nature of the search for truth in the kind of societies we have, he had written:

I doubt not, but if it had been a thing contrary to any man's right of dominion, or to the interest of men that have dominion, *that the three angles of a triangle, should be equal to two angles of a square*, that doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of geometry, suppressed, as far as he whom it concerned was able.

More recently, Barrows Dunham has made the same point. Referring to the 'hierarchy of sciences' in the learned world—with mathematics and physics at the top and psychology and sociology at the bottom—and the reasons conventionally cited

for the general backwardness and lack of prestige of the social sciences, he has written: 'The real reason is that the physical sciences are fairly neutral politically, while the social sciences are full of dynamite'. Barrows Dunham points out that 'generally speaking truth has been suffered to exist in the world just to the extent that it profited the rulers of society,' adding, 'there was a time—and not so very long ago—when these rulers could not afford the knowledge that the earth is round'.

Again, arguing that the backwardness of social sciences derives 'not so much from the intrinsic differences or the mere complexity of subject-matter, but from the strong social pressure of established ruling groups to prevent serious discussion of the foundations of society', J.D. Bernal in his classic *Science in History*, has pointed out that it has always been 'a very dangerous thing to look too closely into the workings of one's own society'.

It is indeed dangerous to be truthful about the way things are in 'modern' societies. Hence the *apologetic* character of most mainstream social science—'a secular priesthood' is how Chomsky once described its practitioners. Hence also the relevance of J.D. Bernal's adjuration:

What social science needs is less use of elaborate techniques and more courage to tackle, rather than dodge, the central issues.

Given the importance of the issues involved, this adjuration is all the more relevant to the study of violence in our society.

My other consideration relates to techniques and methods of research which have, in their own way, facilitated, even reinforced the apologetic character of mainstream social science, pushing research away from a truthful understanding of things. As 'Methodology' what has dominated the field has been, in the main, a modernised version of 'the metaphysical mode of thought' which Engels had found wanting as 'one-sided, limited, abstract' because it studies things 'in their isolation, detached from the whole vast interconnection of things and, therefore, not in their motion, but in their repose; not in their life, but in their death....in considering individual things it loses

sight of their connections; in contemplating their existence it forgets their coming into being and passing away; in looking at them at rest it leaves their motion out of account....it cannot see the woods for the trees.' An 'abstracted empiricism' has been abroad wherein 'the immediately observable, measurable fact' has been 'the moloch', as Paul Baran called it, 'which is always seeking to devour analytic thought in contemporary social science'; 'a social science of the narrow focus, the trivial detail, the abstracted almighty unimportant fact' is how C. Wright Mills described it. David McLellan has observed:

...the huge development of the social sciences in the century since Marx's death has often brought with it results that are thin in two respects: first in the vertical sense of being produced inside a narrow specialization by scholars who know more and more about less and less, and secondly in the horizontal sense that they spring from a preoccupation with the surface phenomena of society, so easily available for observation and quantification.

What I want to suggest is that along with courage, we need to have the requisite methodological sophistication that helps us search for interconnections—'the truth is the whole', Hegel has said—so that our study of violence takes us behind 'the appearance' to 'the nature of things' (Marx), that is, goes beyond descriptive or classificatory exercises to produce explanations. For that is, after all, what scientific understanding is about.



Way back in 1991, in my inaugural address to the Seventh State Conference of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee in Karimnagar—'Terrorism, State Terrorism and Democratic Rights'—I had briefly digressed to refer to violence in our society. Admittedly non-comprehensive and dated—particularly noticeable is absence of reference to gender dimension of violence where recent years have seen even the emergence of 'a political culture of sexual violence' as a mode of establishing the domination of one group over another or of stifling popular protest—the argument is not without its relevance today. I had said:

(We don't have to) ignore or in any way underestimate the problem that private violence has come to be in our society today—its ever-

growing level, scale and diversity are indeed frightening. More and more of the conflicts and tensions generated in this society, above all, by its economy and politics, are seeking to express themselves outside the constitutionally ordained institutional frameworks, including the electoral process which has witnessed a steady decline in popular interest or participation in recent years. If there is widespread socio-political turbulence in society, there is also the widespread, not unjustified, impression that peaceful ways seldom work and issues arrest political attention only through recourse to violence. But any adequate response to the problem of this spreading violence in our society demands, at the very least, the recognition that while any form of violence in due course acquires a certain autonomous dimension, it always arises on and is sustained by a given socio-material basis, and that its various forms, various because of differences of causation, context and conjuncture, need to be carefully distinguished from each other before we decide and act in the matter.

There is, for example, the ordinary personal-motivated violence of different kinds in our society; a most common occurrence, for so long as we have money-and-profit dominated economy and society, all forms of crime and violence which promise to pay will continue to be committed. Any effective response to this violence, obviously, must begin by questioning this domination. Or, again, given the fact that this society is full of glaring injustice and iniquities, oppression and exploitation, it will always have its victims, frustrated and desperate men and women, ready to avenge themselves or their fellow victims, violently or otherwise. The need here is not to pass moral judgements or condemn their motives and actions, but to do whatever we possibly can to change their conditions which make such frustration and desperation, and the accompanying violence, inevitable.

Yet again, along with this 'normal' violence, we have a great deal of specific anti-people violence in our society. There is the recurring violence among the people, on one issue or another, often generated, even actively promoted, by unscrupulous politics at the top. Communal or caste violence is an obvious example; its condemnation, or opposition to such violence does not pose any problems at all. But we need to take particular notice of a more pervasive kind of private anti-people violence, which has finally arrived. The crisis of our poor possessive-market society, its manifold conflicts, its lumpen rapacity and crumbling structures of authority, with the people desperately struggling to survive,

has given rise to a great deal of private violence of the rich and powerful against the people below—landlord armies, armed gangs or vigilante groups of the dominant classes, a rich variety of mafias, all sorts of 'goon squads', often linked with the police, politicians and businessmen, and always available for hire, and so on.

This violence, which, given its overall class character is generally backed, condoned or connived at by the state, deserves to be condemned without reservation. But this private violence, or for that matter lawless violence of the state itself, may provoke counter-violence on the part of the people. The people may be compelled to resist and even retaliate. They may find it necessary to turn to violence in sheer self-defence, or in defence of their democratic right to organise and struggle peacefully. They may need to resort to violence to defend the gains of their past struggles or to exercise the rights they still have including the right to vote, and so on. Such private violence by or on behalf of the people is well-justified; it certainly cannot be treated or condemned in the usual manner.

Our society has also given rise to certain specific forms of private violence, armed protests or struggles by individuals and groups, which are, despite their differences of causation, character and possible futures, generally lumped together as 'terrorism', the country's foremost political problem today. It is not my concern to analyse this problem beyond the general observations I have already made. But one aspect of it does interest us here. We don't have to lump together the various historically specific expressions of this private violence to recognise that even as this 'terrorism' fights the Indian state, it is known to turn, to a greater or lesser degree, against the people too. And this calls for a brief comment.

In any armed protest, resistance or struggle, the quality of its politics, politics commanding the gun, is of decisive importance. If the quality of this politics is poor, the gun becomes increasingly more important, it tends to itself become politics, just as state terrorism tends to do at the other end. In other words, if an armed resistance or struggle lacks a coherent liberationist ideology and programme, the requisite revolutionary theory and practice, which may help it gain the willing support of the people and mobilise them in a popular movement, it will, sooner rather than later, seek to use force to gain this support—really the people's acquiescence or compliance through fear and terror-hardened sensibilities. The policies and actions of the 'terrorists' become increasingly self-

defeating, harming the very people whose cause they otherwise claim to espouse in taking up arms against the state. Just as at the other end, seeking to gain their acquiescence or compliance the same way, state terrorism too harms the people, alienating them from 'India' it claims to be defending for them against the terrorists. In this situation, dependence on foreign aid, aids only the process of moral and political degeneration of the original armed protest or struggle. The consequences are the dead-end game of killing and getting killed, a vicious circle of competitive atrocities and reprisals, intermittent internecine warfare among the various groups and a brutalisation of everyday life of the common people, all of which provides an excellent cover to all sorts of anti-social elements, and every kind of criminal activity. May be Punjab is very much on my mind, but the argument certainly has its general relevance.

Needless to add, terrorist violence against the people has no moral or political justification at all. It can only be condemned. Though, for obvious reasons, detailed knowledge and careful analysis is necessary before we pass judgment in each case. We need to know the truth and not its official version only.

In a society like ours which is structurally saturated with violence, with exploitation and oppression, injustice and inequality, there is always room for revolutionary violence. To reject such violence and uphold non-violence on principle has no justification, rational or moral, in the light of the historical experience of the struggles of the oppressed the world over. As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty once put it, 'to teach non-violence is to strengthen established violence, that is to say, a system of production which makes misery and war inevitable.' Revolutionary violence aims at destroying this established violence and creating a new system of production and society in which 'misery and war' are no longer inevitable. It is a violence, as he put it, 'which transcends itself on the way to the human future'. Thus, for example, the problem that the 'Naxalites', as they are called, present to our society is not one of private violence to be condemned, but of an exploitative and oppressive social order crying out for revolutionary change.

Revolutionary violence may indeed be criticised, even rejected, but not on abstract moral grounds. The grounds have to be specific such as a negative assessment about its 'appropriateness' in a given situation, a lack of 'proportionality' between means and ends, and so on. On the basis of historical experience, it is also possible to

argue against the general efficacy and appropriateness of individual or group acts of revolutionary violence. Even when deemed necessary, one needs to be aware of the dangerous possibility of getting sidetracked or lost in a vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. It is thus absolutely imperative for those so involved to be constantly self-critical of their theory and practice in this regard, as elsewhere, in the interests of the revolutionary movement as a whole. It seems to me, however, that the real issue of revolutionary violence is not so much its rights or wrongs as the taking of sides in the ongoing class war between the people and their oppressors and exploiters.

Looming large over all these forms of violence in our society is the violence that Indian state has come to represent today. The issue here is not its inherently violent nature *as a state*, or the violence implicit in the socio-economic structures this state normally defends, violently or otherwise. What needs to be noticed is its emergence as the single large perpetrator of violence on the people today. Such is the explicit material expression of this violence in recent years that scholars and laymen alike have been compelled to speak of 'state terrorism' or 'the terrorist state' in contemporary India. There is the ever-growing draconian legislation and the ever-expanding apparatus of repression, and the ruthless use of both everywhere in this vast land of ours. The old, extended or new laws are there—ESMA, MISA, NSA, different Armed Forces Special Powers Acts, many kinds of Disturbed or Terrorist Affected Areas Acts, amendments to the Constitution and the Criminal Procedure Code... and so on—which provide for new structures of authority, a new hierarchy of courts, new legal procedures, new ranges of offences, new and stiffer penalties, new detentions without trial and new and harsher powers for the police, para-military forces and the army. New restrictions have come to be imposed on the life and liberties of the people in violation of old and established Constitutional safeguards and new authorisation provided for the lawlessness of the state, including extra-judicial kidnappings and killings known as 'encounters'; and along with 'custodial deaths' even the phenomenon of 'missing', long associated with the dictatorial regimes of Latin America, has arrived.

To execute these laws and this lawlessness, along with the old we now have any number of new police and paramilitary formations, new security set-ups, armed wings, guards and protection groups and the rest, well-supported by the army on

the one hand and the well-rewarded state or politician-sponsored terrorist or vigilante groups on the other. The much-touted 'financial crunch' notwithstanding, financing all this has been no problem at all. In large 'terrorist-affected' parts of the country, it is a situation of massive power, without any checks or accountability, but with an irresistible temptation to confuse every expression of popular protest, dissent or even recalcitrance with terrorism and therefore meant to be handled with ruthless brutality. Unchecked power has its own logic; corruption rampant in the system has taken care of the rest. Whatever its other problems, or problematic success in fighting 'terrorism', the state's terrorism has been remarkably successful in alienating the people and pushing them out of its own 'mainstream', leaving the 'national press' free to deceive itself and mislead the rest of 'the Indian nation'.

Only the nationalistically blind will fail to see that it is this mindless violence of the state, growing ever more mindless in its failure or impotence and the accompanying loss of legitimacy, which spawns anew and fuels the terrorist violence in the country. The two in fact regularly feed, justify and legitimise each other—all the while adding to the misery and suffering of the common people everywhere.



The above discussion of violence in Indian society of course requires to be updated. Perhaps I also need to take specific note of violence that America's foreign policy describes as 'terrorism' and the kinds of violence in our society now sought to be subsumed under this concept; though, as already suggested, most of this violence, including the *jihadist* version is the result of policies and practices of the concerned ruling elites¹; the associated religious fundamentalism, in all its rich variety, too has come up the same way on the social-material basis provided

1. The *jihadist* violence in its international dimension is in fact understandable only in relation to America's imperialist policies and politics in the Middle-East which have, particularly with the issue of Palestine, made it the site of possibly the most outrageous violence of our times.
2. As I have suggested elsewhere, contemporary religious fundamentalism is significant, partly at least, for its opposition to 'consumerism of the West' or 'the American way of life', the

by the kind of society and politics we have.² But immediately I want to focus on 'structural violence', not only because, though the most basic form of violence in our society, it remains least understood and recognised, but even more because, equating revolution with violence, the votaries of non-violence are evading the key question of revolutionary transformation of our society that elimination of this violence calls for. They continue to advocate non-violence or 'the Gandhian way', dialogue, debate, democracy, etc., to achieve ends which these methods regularly fail to achieve because what is involved here is a structural transformation of society which the theory of these votaries of non-violence, in its abstract and exclusive concern with non-violence (or violence), cannot accommodate and their practice, therefore, cannot accomplish.



Marx's historical materialism, his discovery of 'the law of development of human history', indeed opened up the continent of social sciences, as Althusser stated it years ago. One signal achievement here was a structural mapping of society and social change. Marx's analysis of the modern capitalist society postulates a structural dynamics for its mode of production—an interchange with nature to satisfy human wants, to maintain and reproduce life, which is necessary in all social formations and under all modes of production—which for all its productive achievements is structurally saturated with violence, so degrading and damaging to human beings that Marx saw it as not 'worthy of their human nature' and argued for its negation in a socialist mode of production.

The structural violence inhering in capitalism is today starkly visible in every part and aspect of contemporary capitalist world. It is visible in the impoverishment and immiseration on the rise just about everywhere in the world; in

* imperialist cultural domination it is resourceless to understand or overcome. And it has acquired this significance because the traditional Left alternative, in particular the great revolutionary traditions of Marxism and communism seem to have become, for the time being at least, unavailable.

the statistics on rates of unemployment, poverty, homelessness and hunger; in the sullen slums of major cities of Western bourgeois democracies, proliferating urban ghettos of the gritty capitals of former Soviet bloc countries and the warrens of teeming tumbledown shanties of the peripheral South; in the gross inequalities of the world, the wretchedness of the impoverished and excluded within the rich Western societies and the huge mass of misery in the poorer countries; in the morally intolerable and socially unnecessary suffering—what Bourdieu has called *la misere du monde*—produced by capitalism everywhere.

It is no different with India as a 'developing' capitalist society. The evidence is there, scattered all around us if only we are willing to see: a little reason and ability to interconnect is all that is needed. Violence is not only the blood you see flowing.¹ It is violence also when blood dries up in the veins of the poor in our country. It is violence also when 'the market' lords it over life and millions go to bed hungry, when children die at childbirth or if they survive the first year, die a few years later down the line of hunger, malnutrition or disease, when debt-ridden farmers commit suicides, when the young suffer the indignity of unemployment, kids drop out of school to pick rags or labour at *dhabas*, and women walk miles for water, when whole populations are rendered landless and homeless to make

1. Though, even here, the bloodshed by the ruling classes and their counter-revolutions has been far more and worse than the bloodshed attributed, to revolution or revolutionaries by the ideologues and historians of the ruling classes. The October Revolution of 1917 is as good an example here as any other. Bourgeois propaganda's violence in the Russian Revolution did not accompany but *followed* a most peaceful revolution, and was the result of the foreign-backed armed counter-revolution by the former ruling classes. It was a General Kornilov, a major leader of the White Terror unleashed by the counter-revolution, who said: 'The greater the terror, the greater our victories'. 'We must save Russia', he declared, 'even if we have to set fire to half of it and shed the blood of three-fourth of all the Russians'.

way for Special Economic Zones or livelihoods are destroyed in the name of development. There is violence also in the 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order' that Nehru once spoke of....

Incidentally, this 'changing the existing order', a structural transformation, is what Gandhian non-violence is resourceless to carry out and equating revolution with violence, its present-day advocates regularly evade.



For socialists or communists revolution, a socialist transformation of society, is a matter, not of violence or non-violence, but of fundamental structural change in society. As I have written elsewhere: it is not a matter of resorting to violence or picking up arms, which are purely tactical questions, though not to be dismissed on abstract moral grounds. Socialism is about a fundamental change in social production relations which a real, not merely juridical or formal, social ownership of the means of production makes possible. And here, properly interpreted, Marx still remains the guide: 'peaceful if possible, with arms if necessary'. That is, it all depends on historical conditions and possibilities of the objective situation. A peaceful transition is of course the desirable thing. But the issue involved—peaceful or otherwise, or how peaceful—is really one for the ruling classes to respond to: are they willing to accept the people's peaceful, democratic verdict for socialism? As it is, these ruling classes have not even remotely shown this willingness so far. Instead they have invariably used their enormous economic and political power, often across countries, to thwart changes far, far less radical in nature than socialism. One has only to recall the overthrow of Mohammed Massadeh in Iran in 1953, of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, of Joao Goulart in Brazil in 1964, of Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic in 1965, of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, and so on right up to the current efforts to overthrow Hugo Chavez in Venezuela—all of them constitutional democratic regimes...

The world over any effort to seek radical or revolutionary change through democratic processes has been seen by the ruling classes as a challenge to capitalism or the established

order and therefore too dangerous to be allowed to proceed. It has been regularly thwarted or destroyed. Defending America-backed armed intervention against democracy in Chile, Henry Kissinger declared: 'I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible'. I will readily concede that democracy, bourgeois democracy to be precise, has often checked or corrected particular abuses of capitalism, made the struggle against its exploitation less painful, sometimes ratified victories that occurred elsewhere. But it has never yet led to the liberation of the oppressed classes.

Our experience with democracy in India has been no different. More than a decade back, in 1992, I had written:

Obviously, democracy has not meant effective political power for the Indian people. Within almost two decades of Indian freedom and democracy, even so sympathetic a scholar as Gunnar Myrdal, a personal friend of Nehru, wrote of 'the new government's role as the successor to the British raj', of 'the gulf between rulers and ruled', and the life-style and conduct of the new rulers which 'encouraged the view that political independence had done little more than displace a foreign with a native privileged group'. Pointing out that 'India is ruled by a select group of upper class citizens who use their political power to secure their privileged positions' and that 'the power struggle has mainly remained one between individuals and groups in the upper class in the broader sense', he concluded: 'Democracy has not enabled the majority of poor people to grasp, and organise themselves for utilising political power to advance their own interests'. In 1973, V.K.R.V. Rao spoke of 'a political alliance of the intermediate classes with the upper classes, resorting to socialist ideology only to win mass support but using all levers of power to facilitate a type of capitalist development in the interest of a narrow section of Indian society'; and fifteen years later he most emphatically stated that so far as 'the poor and deprived sections of the people' are concerned, 'parliamentary democracy has not been able to meet the challenge'.

The assessment still holds.

This however is not to reject whatever, or whatever kind of, democracy we still have. As I stated above, a peaceful socialist transformation, a transformation through democratic processes remains desirable. But a most important qualification has to be

added. Again, as I have argued elsewhere:

For the people, therefore, if or when they decide to travel the peaceful road, the principle is clear. This is how, in his times, Cromwell, forced to make a revolution, put it: 'Trust in God, and keep your powder dry!' How people 'keep their powder dry' is not my concern at the moment. Only do it they must. What is involved is forging adequate extra-parliamentary sanctions to defend and enforce their democratic verdict, which includes preparedness to counter the inevitable 'slave-holders rebellion', as Marx had called it. Failure to do so will cost them dear, as it did the Chilean people in 1973. They failed to develop their own armed counterweight to defend their democratic verdict against the military coup which soon defied and overturned it, and eventuated in a most brutal counter-revolution, massacre of virtually the entire Chilean left, including the democratically elected President Allende himself and the setting up of the notorious Pinochet dictatorship, all aided and abetted by the forces of international capital headed by the well-known defender of democracy in the world, the United States. I don't have to detail the lessons.

Socialists or communists, I may add, do not *advocate* violence. For them it is a tragic necessity to defend the revolution with violence when the ruling classes violate the victories and rights of the people. People have a natural aversion to violence and revolutionaries respect it—a respect, as Trotsky has underlined in his account of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks demonstrated remarkably in 1917.



Gandhi remains central to any discussion of violence, and therefore non-violence in the world today. Presently his 'non-violence' is a matter of celebrations the world over. If his birth and death anniversaries are occasions for elaborate official and non-official functions in India and the University Grants Commission (UGC) has gone into an overdrive with seminars on 'Gandhi's Satyagraha', etc., the United Nations has declared October 2 as the World Non-violence Day and for the Nobel Foundation it is 'a big regret' that he could not be awarded the Peace Prize. Obviously, Gandhi has been well sanitised and tamed, and accommodated in the system; his 'non-violence' is

no threat to the established order or ruling class hegemony anywhere.

This however is too much or too problematic to concede for the present-day votaries of non-violence. As the argument over the efficacy of non-violence proceeds, it is customary for them to refer to 'the two apostles of peace', Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. They are supposed to exemplify the successful use of Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence. King is lauded as 'an apostle of social harmony' along with a rather loud advocacy of 'Gandhi-King' style of politics, and Mandela is hailed 'as the most outstanding Gandhian leader of modern times'. There is no critical assessment of either King's civil rights movement in the US or Mandela's Gandhianism in South Africa, of what is gained or even lost in the latter case, no awareness at all of how the issue of structural transformation of society still remains central to the situation in each case.

One does not have to deny the gains of the black civil rights movement to note that the Voting Rights Act was described by Ronald Reagan as 'humiliating to the South' and that 'white backlash' and 'racial polarisation' are still facts of life and politics in the United States. Ramsey Clark, former US Attorney General has even suggested a reason here why Islam 'has touched the lives of African Americans'—'they find peace, dignity and a faith they can believe in'. As a recent comment has it:

The civil rights movement's challenge to Jim Crow in the south had secured major advances, but had also exposed the intractability of American racism. Legal segregation had been destroyed, but economic inequality loomed larger than ever.

No wonder King was himself soon moving to a more radical understanding of the situation. Mike Marqusee has noted:

After the first flush of fame, leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956-57, and winning a Nobel Peace Prize in 1963, it would have been easy for him to rise above the fray and enjoy his prestige. He chose to do the opposite. He chose to take the hardest course, confronting the realities of power, the scale of change necessary and the obstacles to that change....The real Dr. King was an altogether more demanding and inspiring figure than the emollient angel being celebrated.

Assessing the overall situation, this is what I wrote sometime back:

The majority of blacks constitute a distinct underclass in the US economy that has been reproduced over and over again since the time of slavery. And despite all the hype over the achievements of the 'Gandhian' civil rights movement, the black youth have remained the underclass they were. The issue of justice to this vast majority of women and men goes to the very heart of the *totality* of US life and cannot be really resolved without structural, that is revolutionary transformation.

It is significant and worth pointing out that the main lesson that grew out of the later phase of the black civil rights movement was that a poor people's movement which is to continue to advance must eventually evolve from a question of rights to a question of power, from civil or political to human emancipation. And this requires a shift in the nature of the organised struggle towards class politics, that is, collective resistance to capitalism. It is not surprising that by 1968, shortly before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. was publicly speaking of what he called 'radical redistribution of economic and political power' and 'a radical reconstruction of American society', of 'self-transforming and structure-transforming direct action'. 'We are engaged in the class struggle', he publicly stated, and pointed out: 'We have been in a reform movement... But after Selma and the voting rights bill (in 1965) we moved into a new era which must be an era of revolution. I think we must see the great distinction here between a reform movement and a revolutionary movement'.

Again, one does not need to be an expert on the history of struggle against apartheid in South Africa to note that Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, during its decades-long struggle, was never a votary of non-violence, Gandhian or any other. It had an effectively functioning military wing. And it had an economic programme which is best described as socialism-oriented. Two weeks before he was freed, in January 1990, in a note to his supporters from prison, Nelson Mandela had said: 'The nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industries is the policy of the African National Congress (ANC) (and changing) our views... is inconceivable. Black economic empowerment is a goal we fully support and

encourage, but in our situation state control of certain sectors of the economy is unavoidable.' Such indeed was the policy of ANC spelled out in 1955 in its Freedom Charter. Now turned Gandhian and reconciliationist, 'an apostle of peace' and a votary of non-violence, Mandela, along with Mbeki and others has also turned away from ANC's programme of a revolutionary restructuring of South African society and opted for neo-liberal, admittedly Thatcherite policies, with disastrous consequences for the common people of South Africa. After over a decade of this new agenda (1994–2006), Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine* has thus highlighted the toll, showing conditions today much worse than under apartheid: the number of people living on less than \$1 a day doubled from two to four million; the unemployment rate more than doubled to 48% from 1991 to 2002; only 5,000 of 35 million black South Africans earn over \$60,000 a year; the ANC government built 1.8 million homes while two million South Africans lost theirs; nearly one million South Africans were evicted from farms in the first decade of democracy; as a result, the shack-dweller population grew by 50%, and in 2006, 25% of South Africans lived in them with no running water or electricity. And there's more: the HIV/AIDS infection rate is about 20%, and the Mbeki government shamefully denied the severity of the crisis and did little to alleviate it; it's been a major reason why average life expectancy in the country declined by 13 years since 1990; 40% of schools have no electricity; 25% of people have no access to clean water and most who do can't afford the cost; and 60% of people have inadequate sanitation, and 40% no telephones....

I will only add that, unlike in India where poverty and wretchedness of the poor is more visible, in South Africa it remains tucked away in the poor townships, 17–18 kilometres away from the city, as was the case under apartheid.

With Nelson Mandela's Gandhian turn, South Africa today is a classic example of a revolutionary resistance movement's betrayal of its people.



Even in India, Gandhi's non-violence has not been the success it is made out to be, not unoften simply assumed to be. Apropos this, way back in 1990, I had written:

...In large historical processes there are continuities and there are breaks, at times even revolutionary breaks which involve a change in the *economic basis*, the economic-structural relations, of society. In India, in our times, no revolutionary break has occurred, neither at independence, nor afterwards. The balance of social forces and ideals in the national movement resulted in the settlement of 1947—its 'transfer of power' involving no basic economic or social or state structural change, but putting new, now *Indian* ruling classes in control of the state power in India. (Nearly two decades later, Gunnar Myrdal was to write of 'the new government's role as the successor to the British raj', of 'the gulf between rulers and ruled' and the life-style and conduct of the new rulers which 'encouraged the view that political independence had done little more than displace a foreign with a native privileged group'). The new rulers set about India's economic development even as they maintained, of course, with due modifications, the class (exploitative) structure of the Indian society as a whole. It is the logic of this structure, the new and the old well articulating with each other, which had a determining influence on what eventually came to be built in the country—an India-specific state-supported capitalism, with every aspect of our social life—politics, culture, morality, everything, everywhere—bearing the mark of this somewhat comprador capitalism.

In these matters, the *subjective* concerns of political leaders, of rulers or their political representatives, matter—but only marginally. In the absence of revolutionary politics which changes the *objective*, economic-structural basis of society, not only does the logic of this basis assert itself in the economy, it also decisively conditions developments in other areas of social life, in politics, morals, culture, ideology, etc.—all changes, no matter how important otherwise, yet remain essentially superstructural. Thus, for example, we know of Gandhi's love and concern for the Indian people which to him meant, above all, the impoverished peasantry of India—'the semi-starved masses... slowly sinking to lifelessness' as he once put it—a love and concern (rather paternal in nature, always fearful of people straying from the 'right' path) which was possibly the most distinguishing feature of Gandhi's social philosophy. Metaphorically speaking, he wanted the peasant to

inherit this country. Yet it is not Gandhi's peasant but a Birla who inherited India in 1947, along with, of course, communal violence, the partition, and much else that Gandhi did not want. And of decisive importance here is the fact that, besides other limitations, Gandhi's political theory and practice (non-violence, trusteeship, satyagraha, etc.) had no room at all for any genuine economic-structural change, not even for radical land reforms, a necessary though not sufficient condition for any improvement in the life of the vast masses of Indian peasantry. Inevitably he failed, here as also elsewhere in most of his declared purposes. Seeking to ensure 'the rights alike of prince and pauper', Gandhism, in effect, only served as a petty-bourgeois ideology in the service of the big bourgeoisie, in the Indian historical process. It is a mark of the greatness of Gandhi, a truly magnificent human being with all his faults, frailties and foibles, that in sharp contrast to the opportunism or pettiness of his many followers, he recognised his failure when it finally occurred, and confessed it—I do not understand how all these terrible things are happening in our country... What mistakes have we made, for we must have made mistakes? Otherwise how could all these things happen?'—and died, as he had lived, fighting for his people, a fulfilled yet disillusioned and disconsolate man.

I had gone on to refer to Nehru also, whose social theory came to exhibit the same inadequacy, a lack of structural mapping of society and social change.

Or, again, we know of Nehru's concern to build socialism in India. He not only argued that 'the only key to the solution of... India's problems lies in socialism', but had insisted: 'and when I use this word I do so not in a vague, humanitarian way, but in a scientific, economic sense'. Aware of the need for 'vast and revolutionary changes', he most perceptively spoke of 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order'. Yet, once in power, Nehru shied away from the cost of even genuine land reforms—they will present numerous practical problems involving basic social conflicts (and may) give rise to organised forces of disruption', the *Draft Outline* of the First Five-Year Plan warned. What is more, he simply abandoned socialism 'in a scientific, economic sense', that is, as a basic economic-structural change. Apart from the insistence on the state playing 'a vital part in planning and development', the focus is increasingly on the need to ensure 'rapid economic development with continually rising levels of production', 'to

exploit natural resources', 'to take sufficient advantage of the advance in science and technology', etc. In fact, in a subtle, perhaps unconscious but politically most convenient shift, he now sought 'the key' not in socialism but in the development of 'science and technology'—'the temples of modern India' and all that. He increasingly opted for what I would describe as 'fetishism of science', that is, investing science with powers it does not in itself have, expecting it to do the job of a social revolution, which it simply cannot. Inevitably, once again, the logic of the economic structure asserted itself. What got built in India was not socialism but capitalism, a state-supported capitalism. The rhetoric of socialism, now redefined as 'a socialistic pattern of society', whatever that meant, served only to deceive and win mass support. And Nehru, even as he gave India the then much-lauded 'vision of socialism', in effect, helped reduce it to only 'a vision' in India. History is indeed a very cruel mistress.



Indian today is indeed a monument to the failure of Gandhi and his non-violence. He himself stands reduced to a symbol frozen in monuments, statues, road names and occasionally the politicians' Khadi, and his non-violence to a subject for Bollywoodian *gandhigiri*. Not a single one of his ideas and ideals, his hopes and dreams for the Indian people, the ends his politics of non-violence sought, has been realised. Instead, India, in its post-Independence capitalist development, has steadily moved away from them, leaving the country more riddled with conflict, disharmony and violence than ever before in its history.

Even so, through all this, all his faults, frailties and failures, all the inadequacies of his theory and practice, peeps a Gandhi who needs to be distinguished from the motley crowd of 'pious do-gooders' and putative 'statesmen' at home and abroad, including not a few Gandhi Peace Prize winners, who today invoke him and preach non-violence to the world. They simply lack Gandhi's greatness of spirit, his honesty and courage, his humanity and, above all, his passionate love and concern for the common man which is indeed *the* distinguishing and redeeming feature of his social theory. They have little in common with a Gandhi who recognised *himsa* in 'the wanton humiliation and oppression of the weak and the killing of their

self respect', in 'the starvation and exploitation to which they are subjected', a Gandhi to whom freedom had no meaning until 'we have wiped every tear from every eye', who offered this 'talisman' for choosing the right course of action: 'Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest human being you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you are contemplating was going to be of any use to him? Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him a control over his own life and destiny?' Gandhi sought a pro-people transformation of Indian society, even though he had no clear theory of how to go about it. He denounced the shackles of a false civilisation and inspired hatred against it, even though his theory provided no solution here, no way to overcome and go beyond it. This Gandhi's legacy is indeed 'political dynamite'. Hence the need to rescue Gandhi from the assorted lot of present-day Gandhians and make him part of Indian people's emancipatory project today—doing this not eclectically, adding up his name or ideas, but in a proper theoretical manner, within an adequate, self-consistent framework which, in my opinion, is best provided by Marxism, its basic understanding of society and social transformation.

Even with the best of the present-day Gandhians, given the essential inadequacy of their theory—which, incidentally, they share with Gandhi—their advocacy of non-violence is only so much moralising politics, a form of utopianism which in its ultimate outcome only serves conservative ends.

Apropos this, I have commented:

A most important aspect of Marxism is its rejection of utopianism in politics. Criticism of utopian thinking by Marx and Engels, regarding socialism or elsewhere, is common knowledge. In a general way Marxism enjoys a theoretical advantage in that its analysis or understanding of society and therefore its politics is a structural and a non-moralising one. In 'Marxism of Karl Marx' moral passion as part of revolutionary ethics is of course central to revolutionary politics, but by itself it generates only a most ephemeral kind of politics which is quickly reabsorbed and recontained by the system it seeks to question and transform. In fact, as historical experience reveals, a moralising politics tends to develop where a structural cognition and mapping of society is blocked. Or, as a scholar has well put it: 'voluntaristic wishful

thinking—often wedded to a direct appeal to the authority of claimed moral imperatives—tends to predominate in politics precisely at times when the advocated political objectives are poorly grounded, due to the inherent weakness of those who promote them. Direct appeal to morality in such political discourse is used as an imaginary substitute for identifiable material and political forces which would secure the realisation of the desired objectives.'



Advocacy of non-violence is almost invariably accompanied by a confused and confusing discussion of the question of means and ends. I would like to make a brief clarificatory comment on the controversy¹ and then relate it to the issue of the often cited or acclaimed success of Gandhi's non-violence in winning India's freedom.

It is axiomatic that the means are justified by the end they achieve; there is simply no other way to justify them. As Professor G.C. Field, a scholar of impeccable orthodoxy has argued in his book *Moral Theory*:

Of course the end justifies the means; if we will the end we will the means to it. As for doing evil that good may come, it is really a meaningless phrase: because if good comes of it, and it was done with that intention, it cannot be evil.

Put a bit strongly, the argument essentially holds. Against this we have the conventional view. As formulated by one of its leading advocates:

I suppose that of the many lessons that Gandhiji taught, perhaps the most important was that means are more important than ends. If in the process of achieving the ends, the means are bad or twisted, we will not reach the ends. If our aim in life is a good life, how can we reach it by unworthy means?

Though well-meaning, this is a confused view and the confusion here is caused by three interrelated reasons.

The first reason concerns the origin and nature of the morality or 'goodness' of the means. In the conventional view

1. The argument here is reproduced from John Lewis' two contributions to *The Modern Quarterly*, in 1946 and 1950.

they are assumed to be or treated as 'good' in themselves, which is simply not the case. Our morals, ideals or ethical principles do not exist in themselves, in their own right, independently of nature and history, rooted in God, gods or scriptures or in some way possessing an eternal, absolute, authoritative reality of their own. According to a naturalistic view of man and his world, now accepted by most scholars of ethics and by anthropologists, psychologists and scientists in general, all mental, moral or spiritual phenomena are genuine functions of living organisms at the human level of development (just as life itself is a mode of behaviour of matter at a particular level). It is thus argued that the evolutionary process has risen higher than its source, nature has evolved humans with their morals, ideals or ethical principles. These emerge from the requirement of social life and derive their validity from their usefulness. Hence they are also subject to modification according to circumstances and may, under certain conditions, be suspended.

The conventional view, in effect, postulates that we must confine ourselves to *means that are in themselves good*, judging the morality of our actions by reference to some absolute rule and not by the consequences. But this is not a moral proceeding. Sound ethics requires us always to judge the action by the results, good and bad, and not by its conformity to a rule, regardless of results. The validity of moral rules does not lie in themselves as though strict conformity to them were good regardless of what happened. That a moral rule has come to be established means of course that it is generally to the interests of people that it should be followed and that when it is broken evil results, but that does not mean that it must never be broken. It may be necessary, though if that is the case it will be exceptional and regrettable, and evil will follow.

This immediately suggests the second reason for confusion in the conventional view: the failure to draw a distinction between what is evil and what is morally wrong. It is a good rule, for instance, not to inflict pain, but serious operations involving suffering are sometimes necessary, and if we avoid them even more pain will result. The evil in such cases has to be accepted. Again, lying is generally wrong and always an evil,

but we resort to deception of the enemy in war, and sometimes conceal the truth from sick persons. There are certainly occasions when not to lie would be a most immoral course of conduct, as when we might have to misdirect an intending murderer to save his victim's life. There is an ethical principle involved here: *There is no moral rule that duty may not compel us to break in exceptional cases.*¹

Every morally serious person finds himself from time to time in a situation where he must break a moral rule to achieve a greater good; and he believes that he is *right* to do so. The principle that it is never right to depart from moral principles, even to achieve some good end, no matter how many people would suffer if the rule were not broken, far from reflecting a superior ethical standpoint, is supremely unethical and is generally regarded as such.

When moral rules are broken we become responsible for evil and although at the same time we may be achieving good, that good is diminished by reason of the evil we do. We must never console ourselves by saying that the evil is really good because it attains good ends. It would be quite incorrect to say that any means that produce a good end are themselves *ipso facto* good. That would indeed be an expression of the thoroughly unethical doctrine that the end justifies the means, and so would any decision which considered *only* the end and its value and did not balance against it the evil involved in the means. An ethical approach will acknowledge that the means are evil and will weigh that evil against the good that it achieves; if the decision is to adopt those means, they are still recognised as evil, but because the good outweighs that evil it is morally right to adopt them. The means are evil—but it may nevertheless be immoral not to use them.

The person who sticks to the rule regardless of the fact that by doing so he is responsible for more evil than if he broke it, is

1. Gandhi, incidentally, allowed such breaking of moral rules and did not rule out even adoption of violence under certain circumstances.

not the highly moral person that he claims to be, but morally irresponsible.

The third reason for confusion in the conventional view is implicit in the two reasons discussed above. As Professor Field has stated it:

From the point of view of practical decision, the end does always justify the means in the sense that the course of action which will produce a balance of good results in the circumstances should be adopted. [But] the particular course of action which may be the best means to a particular end, may also produce other results which are not desirable; and if on striking a balance we find that this course of action will produce more evil than good, it should, of course, not be adopted.

In other words, when considering the end likely to be achieved by the means we are contemplating, one must take into consideration *all* the consequences of the means adopted—not merely the direct consequence, the main end, but the indirect consequences, those perhaps undesirable results flowing from the means but not part of the result aimed at. A good deal of misunderstanding is obviously due to the critics entirely ignoring this generally admitted qualification. They invariably assume, and on no grounds at all except their own determination to put their opponents in the wrong, that those who select the means appropriate to a certain end deliberately ignore the evil flowing from those means. Why in the world should they? The means are chosen because they are suitable; they are suitable because their results are good, and these results include *all* and not merely *some* of the results.

The real issue in the controversy over means and ends is not therefore as to whether we may or may not adopt means involving evil to attain a good which outbalances that evil or to avoid a still greater evil, but as to *whether the good attained is really worth the cost, or whether there is another route to that good involving less evil*. We may also disagree not only as to worth of the good to be achieved but as to the extent of the evil involved in attaining it, and here the point of view and the social position of the contestants affects considerably their decisions. No class will ever resent the injustice done to others as much as it resents

the injustice from which it suffers. Those who do not themselves suffer from the evils of unemployment will never regard it as an evil greater than the evil to them of social remedies for unemployment which touch their privileges. It is factors like these that underlie the ethical struggles in matters of willed social change or transformation.

I will only add that adoption of means involving evil, however necessary, needs to be done in full awareness of the insidiously corrupting power of evil. It is not a matter of 'a little water clears us of this deed'. Evil, and for that matter good, is not something that you can switch off and on at will, as Machiavelli says his Prince can and should. Far more relevant and insightful here is Shakespeare when King Macbeth desperately asks: Will these hands never be clean again? ('Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making green one red.') ❖

The above discussion puts the issue of 'India winning freedom through Gandhian non-violence' in proper light. I am not going to discuss the validity of this claim or attempt any exhaustive assessment of Gandhian politics in our freedom struggle, much less his role as an astute politician as, for example, in the Subhas Bose episode or as an idealist as, for example, in the Bhagat Singh episode where, there is always the consideration that those truly passionate about an ideal tend to justify any means to achieve it. I will only draw attention to a few considerations to argue for a more honest or balanced view of the success of Gandhian non-violence in winning India's freedom in 1947.

We may again note Gandhi's own view in this regard, as expressed in the wake of the Mountbatten settlement and the accompanying horrors of communal conflict and massacres spread over wide areas of India:

I do not understand how all these terrible things are happening in our country. For many years the Congress has struggled and grown, and it has grown stronger and stronger, and advanced higher and higher; but now, after we have reached the pinnacle, somehow these horrible things are happening, and the Congress

is not able to do anything effective to stop them. What mistakes have we made, for we must have made mistakes? Otherwise how could all these things happen? It seems that while we were building the Congress, at the same time it was decaying; and today it is obvious that it has decayed, because it is not able to fight all the bad things that are going on in India today.

Again:

Everything looks dark to me, very dark, and I see very little hope. Some people say that after the dark night comes the bright dawn; but I only see the darkness of the night. I do not know when the dawn will come.

Yet again, when Gandhi proclaimed his last fast (on January 12, 1948) against the spreading horror:

Death for me would be a glorious deliverance rather than I should be a helpless witness to the destruction of India.

We have also noted that India today is a monument to the failure of Gandhi's politics of non-violence. Not only his larger ideas and ideals stand abandoned, even his particular hopes or promises remain unrealised. For example, communal peace and harmony he sought remains as distant as ever and those whom he anointed '*harijans*' continue to suffer as they have done all along.

(Perhaps Gandhi had some presentiment of this failure. His fast of January 12, 1948 was not only for communal peace but also against corruption in the Congress—'factionalism and money-making activities' of its legislators and ministers. 'Let us beware' he had warned and advised even disbanding of the Congress—an advice which was simply ignored by power-hungry Congress leaders).

Surely it is not denying Gandhi's greatness, or his pioneering role in mobilising millions in the cause of India's freedom, to suggest that all this and much else that is wrong with India today, has something to do with Gandhi's politics of non-violence in India's freedom struggle.

Votaries of non-violence at home or abroad, however, continue to cite India's freedom as a success story of Gandhian non-violence. As I have said above, my concern here is not with the merits of this claim, only with pointing out that in terms of

means-ends controversy, this a confused, if not dishonest, claim in the sense that focusing on *the* end in view, India's freedom, it overlooks other ends or consequences resulting from the Gandhian means.

The first and foremost consideration here is the partition of the country, the hideous orgy of violence, of mass murders and destruction which accompanied it, and the long-term cost of it all that we are still paying and the future generations will continue to pay.

It is true that when the peaceful settlement he sought arrived in the shape of the Mountbatten Award and was revealed to bring about the partition of India and communal riots, Gandhi was the first to sound the alarm and oppose it. 'Vivisection of India can only take place over my dead body' he declared and jumped into the fray. Gandhi indeed died, battling in the cause of communal peace and unity of India. Even so, Gandhi's politics cannot escape the responsibility for the partition of India and what accompanied or followed it. The parts of India which ultimately went into the making of Pakistan were predominantly feudal areas with vast masses of impoverished Muslim peasantry. Gandhi's policy prescriptions for India's national movement had little or nothing to offer this peasantry to draw it into India's freedom struggle. Gandhi's social theory simply could not accommodate a programme of radical land reforms. The absence of any such programme, together with Gandhi's combination of nationalism with Hindu revivalism and his use of Hindu symbols in the national movement, left this Muslim peasantry eminently vulnerable to the appeal of Muslim League's communal politics as also to the imperialist policies of playing on religious divisions—all of which helped to sow the seeds of the terrible harvest that was the partition of India. This denouement was also, in part at least, the nemesis of a quarter century's preaching of non-violence frustrating the revolutionary energy of the masses.

Again, Gandhi's search for a peaceful, negotiated settlement with the British allowed them to continue with their imperialist policies and intrigues, foment divisive communalism, play the Congress and Muslim League against each other and ultimately

succeed in partitioning India and salvaging as much of their imperialist interests as possible. Peaceful settlement also meant that there was no revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist rule, no *breaking away* from the old order of things. The freedom that was won involved no economic, social or political revolution in the country, only a transfer of power from the foreign rulers to Indian rulers—'the political independence has done little more than displace a foreign with a native privileged group' is how Gunnar Myrdal saw it a couple of decades later.

It was typical of Gandhi's politics of non-violence that when the greatest national upsurge swept India after the second world war—popular support for the Indian National Army (INA) soldiers on trial, strike in the Royal Indian Navy, peasant struggles (for example, Tebhaga in Bengal and Telangana in Hyderabad) working-class actions (for example, the countrywide postal strike), people's movements and revolts in the Princely states, etc.—which also witnessed unprecedented Hindu-Muslim fraternisation in the streets, Gandhi saw in this upsurge only the threat of 'delivering India over to the rabble' and hastened to welcome the Cabinet Mission and advocate a compromise settlement with the British. If, for Viceroy Wavell, as he noted in his journal, India was 'on the edge of a volcano', which soon led the British to abandon any hopes of holding out longer, particularly since even the loyalty of Indians in the army was now suspect, for Gandhi, this revolt from below with its revolutionary possibilities was the menace of 'red ruin and anarchy', which had to be countered or averted with a compromise settlement with the British.

Yet again, implicit in the peaceful settlement noted above was another long-term consequence that needs to be considered. It was the old socio-economic and state-bureaucratic structures left behind by the freedom of 1947, which, with all their structural compulsions, became the basis for the post-Independence Nehruvian national project of self-reliant economic development promising 'growth with equity and distributive justice', but which, given the structural logic of its basis, almost inevitably ended up as 'a type of capitalist development in the interests of a narrow section of Indian

society', as V.K.R.V. Rao described it. Passing through a series of crises mid-1960s onwards, the Nehruvian project finally collapsed in 1991, with the ruling classes going for 'globalisation' as their new strategic option—a shift from the state-supported capitalism to a wholly privatised 'free market' capitalism and from self-reliance in economic development to reliance on Foreign Direct Investment and the multinationals, a shift euphemistically described as 'economic reform', whose structural logic, as a former President of Brazil once reported it to the masters in Washington, is: 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not'. Whatever be the benefits that 'economic reform' has brought to a small section at the top, it has further polarised our society, played havoc with the lives and livelihoods of the common people and pushed our poor still further into a peripheralised existence within the global capitalist system.

Apropos India's 'development' during the Nehru era, I had written:

To borrow from Tom Paine's metaphoric rejoinder to Burke's attack on the French revolution, admiration for the 'plumage' of India's 'national development' should not prevent us from seeing its failure in 'the dying bird'. The world indeed looks very different from below, when the poor and oppressed of 'our nation' look at it.

This is even more true of 'development' during the current era of neo-liberal economic reform, when we not only continue to move away from everything Gandhi held dear or wanted for his people, but our society remains structurally saturated with violence and our people continue to bear the 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order'.

This too is, in its own way, a consequence of Gandhi's politics of non-violence, the means which, it is claimed, won us our freedom.

There is much else in Gandhi's politics or in India today which can be considered as the consequences other than freedom of India which the votaries of non-violence almost invariably ignore. For example, Gandhi's love and concern for the common man notwithstanding, his 'non-violence' continues

to be useful to the ruling classes in various ways. Or, Gandhi's involvement with Hinduism (including his effort to purify it), his combination of nationalism with Hindu revivalism or mixing of religion with politics, his openly avowed and expressed religiosity may not have much to do with the present day *Hindutva*, 'cultural nationalism', religiosity or revivalism, but all this has certainly served as an obstacle to the much-needed secularisation of Indian polity. Or the obscurantist elements in Gandhi's world outlook, which have obviously reactionary, anti-people implications and which, incidentally, have allowed today's post-modernist obscurantism to line up Gandhi in support of its attack on what is described as 'imperious enlightenment vision'; and so on.

One can concede these other consequences—other than India's freedom—flowing from or associated with Gandhi's politics of non-violence and still argue that freedom as won in 1947 was worth the cost or that it was the only suitable route to India's freedom. But the argument has to be more honest or balanced than it normally is or has been. It should, at the very least, allow for a different assessment of the cost and suitability of both this route and a possibly better and less costly *revolutionary* route to India's freedom espoused, among others, by Bhagat Singh later in his life. As Indian people's struggle for freedom continues, the issue in any case remains open and relevant today.



I will conclude this address by returning to the point I had made at the beginning. Violence is a social, conjuncturally produced phenomenon. Most violence today arises from the way 'the modern society' is organised and from the politics and practices of the dominant classes or elites. To borrow Macpherson's analogy, complaining about the bread (violence in this case) we must not forget the bakery (that is the society) which produces it. Therefore, even as we seek specific remedies for specific forms of violence in our society—which, however arisen, often tend to become an autonomous factor in society—we need to move towards organising a just and humane, genuinely democratic society. It is going to be a long haul. But there is no alternative.

Chapter 11

Of Parliamentary Politics*

I

Socialists' loss of their vision of the future has, as we have seen, many negative consequences for their politics. The most important such consequence, to be specifically noted, is that socialists seem to have lost the capacity to think in terms of a different, alternative project in opposition to the currently dominant capitalist project. People are being driven by their conditions to protest and rebel, movements with distinct anti-systemic thrust are coming up everywhere. The absence of a socialist vision of the future and, therefore, of a radical alternative geared to it, cripples and frustrates these emerging struggles of the people, even helps the enemy to divert popular discontent and frustration in dangerous directions. Again, it is idle to expect people to engage in sustained political action for an alternative social order unless they know something about the ends and the means, about where we are going and how we intend to get there. After the broken hopes and shattered dreams of the recent past, it is all the more clear that no movement will now embark on a long, historical journey without knowing what it is aiming at and what is the route to it. Socialists therefore need to recover the capacity to think and

* Excerpts from the author's *Crisis of Socialism—Notes in Defence of a Commitment*.

act in terms of an alternative sociality project. That this project has to be formulated for each different country is obvious enough—the nation-state remains the main arena of struggle in each country has to find its own answers to its problems. But while such diversity is both necessary and desirable, there is still one overriding consideration. The current success of capitalism rendering reformist gradualism irrelevant and its adherents themselves abandoning their socialism altogether, revolutionary socialism is the sole realistic agenda today. More than ever before, a socialist project today has to be a project of revolutionary socialism and its politics, diversity notwithstanding, has to be revolutionary politics. But here at least one clarification is in order.

Revolutionary politics does not mean thinking and acting in terms of storming the Bastille or seizing the Winter Palace, or launching an immediate armed struggle. There are socialists for whom revolutionary politics is unthinkable except in association with a revolutionary upheaval. For them the task is to set about organising this upheaval, 'to make a revolution'—anything else is dangerous and discredited reformism. This is a wholly mistaken view in that it misses out on the necessarily long period of preparatory ideological and political struggles that go into the making of a socialist revolution, even if it is viewed as an upheaval. At its worst, this view even ends up as so much posturing, an alibi for doing nothing. This is not to deny or foreclose the issue that situations may be there in some parts of the world where the main task is to concentrate on organising a revolution, though even here success is most likely only if the task is undertaken with due care and preparation, which does not necessarily rule out all 'reformist' activity. But the situation generally, and certainly in most parts of the world today, is one of long haul. The main task here is to reach out to the people, organise their class and mass struggles, constantly raise these struggles to the level of political struggles, and relate them to the overall objective of revolutionary transformation of society, the socialist revolution we seek. It is only through such struggles that people will learn to need and make this revolution, whatever eventual shape or form it takes.

This is not an easy task to carry out. Here we are indeed face with a problem that is as old as socialism itself. The movement for socialism has an inevitable duality within it. A socialist movement has to fight within the framework of existing capitalist society but must inevitably offer solutions which ultimately lie beyond that framework; it has to struggle for a socialist future from within a capitalist present. If it concentrates too much on that future it runs the risk of sectarian isolation. Yet if it limits itself to struggle within the system, it loses its original *raison d'être*, the search for a radically different society. The task for the socialist movement thus is to preserve a permanent link between its current partial or defensive struggles and its vision of a future socialist society which is at once distant and crucial. As the *Communist Manifesto* has it:

The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.

At the tactical level we have the Leninist insistence that socialists must constantly relate specific grievances to a criticism of the system *as a whole*, constantly showing how they are linked together and therefore how people's specific struggles are also linked to the struggle for a revolutionary transformation of society. In other words, the key task is to establish linkages between theory and practice which would lead everyday resistance beyond short-term demands towards socialism. As Lenin, among many others including Gramsci, understood, these linkages did not spontaneously emerge from ordinary working class life or struggle. It was up to socialists to perceive them theoretically and then forge them into practices or actions which made sense to the working people and linked their ongoing struggles to the coming of a socialist future.

Though easy to formulate in theory, what is involved here is possibly the most difficult yet vital practical task in the struggle for socialism: to link the *immediate* (necessarily reformist) activity with the *ultimate* (essentially revolutionary) objectives; or to phrase it differently, to preserve the integrity of

the *ultimate* perspective without losing contact with the *immediate* demands, determinations and potentialities of the historically given condition. Struggle for the immediate or limited aims and objectives is how people, necessarily, begin their struggle against the system and for a better life. Important as a way of saying 'No' to capitalism in a concrete manner or winning gains for the people, given *socialist* leadership, this struggle can also be a means of enhancing people's consciousness and organisation for the ultimate socialist transformation. Reform and revolution thus must not be seen as mutually exclusive opposites. The task rather is to subordinate reform to revolution.

This is how Marx had argued in his controversy with Bakunin and anarchists. As a revolutionary, Marx rejected voluntarism. As against his opponents who tended to rely on 'spontaneity' and 'instinctive conscience of the popular masses', Marx viewed the development of a *socialist mass consciousness* as necessary for a socialist revolutionary reconstruction of society. For him this was possible only through struggles over a long period.

To conclude, even as we recognise that struggle for socialism, as always, is a *revolutionary* struggle and that socialist politics is nothing if it is not *revolutionary* politics, it does not mean any kind of rejection of reforms. What is demanded is that socialists struggle for reforms as revolutionaries, that is, they remain faithful to socialist principles, imbue the necessarily partial popular struggles with socialist consciousness, put *socialist meaning* into people's experience as they struggle for, win or lose, reforms, and thus help them become more effective subjects or makers of the socialist revolution, in whatever shape or form it has to be eventually made....

II

Our view of the struggle in defence of democracy also points to the right perspective for the revolutionary Left's participation in electoral or parliamentary politics—an issue to which, given its importance, I shall be returning later in these notes. There is no denying that this politics has built-in pressures towards

reformism. But this by itself is not and cannot be an argument against participation in such politics, against the use of electoral or parliamentary politics as part of the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. What is important here is the meaning you put into it, the ideology or political consciousness that informs such use, or for that matter the struggle against capitalism as a whole. Every form of political activity or struggle is potentially 'reformist' if it is conducted in ideological and organisational isolation from the broader struggle where the capitalist system is the enemy to confront, if the immediate struggle is not linked to the ultimate or strategic object or a socialist transformation of society. Reform, a contest with the ruling class where you are, or within the existing institutions, is where you begin the revolution,—and you cannot begin it otherwise, elsewhere. But it is a beginning, a part of the revolutionary process only if it is suffused with the revolutionary consciousness of a socialist. What is really involved here is the relation between reform and revolution where its mistaken understanding has often seen it as an either/or question and thus counterposed one against the other. A proper understanding, as Marx, the active revolutionary, himself emphasised, says 'yes' to both but insists that in revolutionary politics reform needs to be subordinated to revolution. A revolutionary struggle against capitalism, therefore, does not in any way rule out the exercise of the rights of bourgeois democracy or the use of its institutions as futile. On the contrary, and very rightly too, revolutionary socialist politics enjoins such exercise and use whenever, wherever and to the degree possible. And this, in principle, includes participation in electoral or parliamentary politics. To argue for such participation is not to deny or overlook either the ultimately violent nature of the bourgeois democratic state or the subordination of the electoral-parliamentary regimes to the rules established by this state. It is to suggest that notwithstanding its problems and pitfalls, or 'civilising' influence on the revolutionaries, electoral or parliamentary politics can be and need to be treated as another arena of class struggle, where openings are available for ideological-political struggle against the capitalist social order, where we can carry our own agenda

to a vast potential constituency of ours, where we can educate and organise people for non-electoral, extra-parliamentary revolutionary socialist politics. What is ruled out is primary reliance on electoral strategies or anything else that would encourage the illusion of a primarily electoral or parliamentary route to socialism.

Participation in electoral or parliamentary politics is essentially a tactical and not a strategic question which, therefore, always admits of exceptions. But wherever possible or opted for, it has to be subordinated to extra-parliamentary class and mass politics, including the larger counter-hegemonic struggle against capitalism. People's power grows primarily out of such politics, out of their own activity, organisation and struggle, as these come to be suffused with revolutionary consciousness. Following Lenin, Gramsci is a good guide here. For him, participation in electoral or parliamentary politics is a tactical issue contingent on the strategic struggles centred on the class and mass organisations challenging the ruling class state. This relationship between strategic extra-parliamentary and tactical electoral politics must not be inverted. Nor is the notion of revolutionary praxis to be divorced from the self-organised and autonomous class struggle of the working masses in the name of 'flexible tactics', 'realism' and 'possibilism', or by raising the bogey of 'sectarianism', 'adventurism' or 'political immaturity'—formulas and phrases which social-democratic reformism has used over the years, all over the world, to rationalise class collaboration and justify or condone any and every kind of pragmatism, even opportunism on the terrain of bourgeois democratic politics.

It is necessary to recognise the decisive importance of extra-parliamentary class and mass politics for any renewed struggle for socialism, or, for that matter, any significantly radical people change in society today. This is particularly necessary in view of the dismal failure of parliamentary politics in recent decades and globalisation's continued undermining of parliamentary-democratic institutions. It is not only that capital, which is 'by definition, and very effectively in its mode of acting and function, an extra-parliamentary force', is powerful over

society by virtue of its dominance in the economy; its power is further reinforced by the capitalist classes' ideology and personnel-wise domination of the various apparatuses of the state. This truly massive extra-parliamentary power of capitalism can only be matched by the working people's extra-parliamentary force and modes of action, their articulation in forms which are capable of offensive action against capitalism. It is significant that important economic or political 'gains' of the working people have almost invariably been the result of their reliance on 'extra-parliamentary' forms of struggle and organisation, whether in unions, protest movements, militant actions, or elsewhere, through the extra-electoral pressure they exercised on different institutions of the state. Indeed, to be at all effective, parliamentary politics itself has needed and today even more badly needs the radicalising pressure and support of extra-parliamentary politics. Beyond that, if the aim be socialism, it is unthinkable that the struggle for socialism can today at all advance without a radical reconstitution of the socialist movement as a strategically oriented and sustained extra-parliamentary mass movement capable of mounting an effective challenge to the capitalist powers that be.

Our emphasis on the importance of active extra-parliamentary politics does not imply any kind of lawlessness, nor, as we have already clarified, an aprioristic rejection of electoral or parliamentary politics. But it does demand freeing of the working people's movement from the crippling constraints which the parliamentary 'rules of the game' one-sidedly impose on it in the name of 'democratic politics'. It certainly rejects delusions of successful struggle against capitalism through parliamentary means. But it does not in any way pre-empt the issue of peaceful transition to socialism. Socialism, as we had insisted earlier, is not a matter of resorting to violence or picking up arms, which are purely tactical questions, though not to be dismissed on abstract moral grounds. Socialism is about a fundamental change in social production relations which a real, not merely juridical or formal, social ownership of the means of production makes possible. And here, properly interpreted, Marx still remains the guide:

'peaceful if possible, with arms if necessary'. That is, it all depends on historical conditions and possibilities of the objective situation. A peaceful transition is of course the desirable thing. But the issue involved—peaceful or otherwise, or how peaceful—is really one for the ruling classes to respond to: are they willing to accept the people's peaceful, democratic verdict for socialism? As it is, these ruling classes have not even remotely shown this willingness so far. Instead, they have invariably used their enormous economic and political power, often across countries, to thwart changes far, far less radical in nature than socialism. For the people, therefore, if or when they decide to travel the peaceful road, the principle is clear. This is how, in his times, Cromwell, forced to make a revolution, put it: 'Trust in God, and keep your powder dry!' How people 'keep their powder dry' is not my concern at the moment. Only do it they must. What is involved is forging adequate extra-parliamentary sanctions to defend and enforce their democratic verdict, which includes preparedness to counter the inevitable 'slave-holders' rebellion', as Marx had called it. Failure to do so will cost them dear, as it did the Chilean people in 1973. They failed to develop their own armed counterweight to defend their democratic verdict against the military coup which soon defied and overturned it, and eventuated in a most brutal counter-revolution, massacre of virtually the entire Chilean Left including the democratically elected President Allende himself and the setting up of the notorious Pinochet dictatorship, all aided and abetted by the forces of international capital headed by the well-known defender of democracy in the world, the United States. I don't have to detail the lessons....

III

The question of people's power in the state, their struggle for 'political supremacy' or state power is absolutely central to any struggle for a better life for the common people. There is no way a serious people's movement can avoid the question of political power. The real issue here is the concrete forms of struggle for it. This, obviously, cannot be settled beforehand; the objectives and the forms of struggle to be adopted or

combined depend on the specific and ever-changing historical circumstances. While the revolutionary tradition has a great deal to offer here, the formula remains that of the great tactician Napoleon Bonaparte which Lenin was fond of reiterating; '*On é'engage et puis on voit*' (we join the battle and then we'll see). But there is one issue here which, though noted earlier, deserves a more specific reference, namely, the pursuit of revolutionary politics in regimes of more or less developed bourgeois democracy, where participation in parliamentary politics has posed so many intractable, still unresolved problems for the revolutionaries.

Problems here are far too many to be listed. The critics have pointed their accusing finger at the Socialist and Communist Parties which, opting for parliamentary politics, have steadily slid into reformism. Such participation breeds 'parliamentary cretinism', a naive equation of electoral victory with winning of power, even with radical change itself, so that there is no need for or interest any longer in developing a militant revolutionary movement. Whatever movements exist or are built outside are subordinated to the 'struggle' inside the parliament. The electoral success is bought at the cost of an ideological backslide which has lasting deleterious effect. Operating on the terrain of bourgeois politics, responding to issues it presents and accepting the choices it offers, entails a corruption of political consciousness and loss of revolutionary commitment. Criticism of bourgeois parties for failing by their own standards—a staple of parliamentary politics—almost invariably leads to endorsing these standards yourself so that your original concerns come to be given a go-by. The process of making yourself electable on the terms set by the establishment leads to mirroring the establishment's view of the revolutionary Left who are now seen as an embarrassment, when not treated with plain hostility. Parliamentary politics, even as it corrupts in so many ways, exercises a most 'civilising' influence on revolutionaries, as Laski was fond of pointing out. It is no coincidence that the ruling classes looking for 'the most outstanding parliamentarians', or models of 'parliamentary rectitude', for their awards and honours have not unoften found

them among leaders of Socialist or Communist Parties. They are hailed by the mainstream media as 'statesmen' for their role as the best custodians of bourgeois politics. And so on.

That the ruling classes have been eminently successful in using democracy, its rights and institutions against the people and for promoting their own class interests and that the greatest enemy of democratisation in the world today, the US, can hawk 'democracy' around the world in support of its imperialist politics makes parliamentary politics all the more suspect in the eyes of its critics.

The critics are fully justified in what they say, but their criticism does not add up to a justification for any kind of 'anti-parliamentary cretinism', the in-principle rejection of parliamentary politics by certain ultra-Left sections of the revolutionary movement. What we have here are problems that have to be confronted and resolved in terms of revolutionary vigilance in theory and practice and not evaded in a cretinous rejection of 'bourgeois democracy'. Parliamentary politics and electoral struggles are not to be rejected, or even treated as mere defensive tactics for the working people. They are today an integral part of any long revolutionary. They do not necessarily prevent a revolutionary movement or party from establishing and functioning on its own terrain, the terrain of independent class-based people's politics, which even as it confronts bourgeois politics on the latter's terrain, in parliament or outside, uses it to pose its own issues and choices, in its own way, before the people—not just for some electoral gains but real political advance. In other words, there is nothing in bourgeois democracy or parliamentary politics that in itself prevents its being subordinated to the extra-parliamentary politics of a revolutionary party or movement. Parties or movements are indeed coming up today, notably in Latin America, which are thus combining parliamentary and extra-parliamentary methods in pursuit of their revolutionary objectives.

The issue here is not commitment to democracy which has always been a vital part of the socialist agenda—and it is people who have fought for and won whatever democracy we have; and they need and value it most. Nor is it 'bourgeois

democracy'—apropos which Miliband, with the bitter Soviet experience in mind, has written:

Regimes which do, either by necessity or choice, depend on the suppression of all opposition and the stifling of all civic freedoms must be taken to represent a disastrous regression, in political terms, from bourgeois democracy, whatever the economic and social achievements of which they must be capable... The civic freedoms which, however inadequately, form part of bourgeois democracy are the product of centuries of unremitting popular struggles. The task of Marxist politics is to defend these freedoms and to make possible their enlargement by the removal of their class boundaries.

It is not even that parliamentary politics, as a form of politics, has its possibilities in the struggle for socialism and cannot be rejected so long as these possibilities remain unexhausted, not in your theory but in people's own practical experience, and, therefore, as a general principle, participation in parliamentary politics is necessary whenever and wherever possible—though exceptions to this principle are admissible in specific historical situations when people's interests, interests of their revolutionary movement so demand. The real issue here is an approach distant both from ultra-Leftism on the one hand and from social democratic politics of accommodation on the other. It is the principle, but without any exception this time, that parliamentary politics needs always to be subordinated to extra-parliamentary class and mass politics. It can never be over-emphasised that people's power grows only out of such politics, out of their own activity, organisation and struggles as these come to be suffused with revolutionary socialist consciousness.

It may be added that participation in parliamentary politics does not by itself or necessarily mean accepting the prevalent social order. Engels had categorically stated:

the political freedoms, the right of assembly and association and the freedom of the press—these are our weapons. Are we to sit back and abstain when somebody tries to rob us of them? It is said that a political act on our part implies that we accept the existing state of affairs. On the contrary, so long as this state of affairs offers us the means of protesting against it, our use of these means does not signify that we recognise the prevailing order.

These means, including participation in parliamentary politics, can in fact be used to redefine and extend the democratic parameters of the prevailing order in favour of the revolutionary movement, its extra-parliamentary struggles.

A Marxist perspective on the revolutionary process does not pose the issue of struggle for socialism, as its simplistic or ignorant critics think, in terms of violence or non-violence or insurrectionist versus non-insurrectionist strategy. For it the real issue is an articulation and relationship between two terrains of struggle, that waged *within* the existing institutions of bourgeois democracy, and that waged *outside* them, in which the latter is always and ultimately the *decisive* terrain. Such was the perspective of Lenin, the principle underlying his notion of 'dual power'. Conceptualised by him in relation to the revolutionary process in Russia, 'dual power' has generally been taken to mean an adversary relation between a revolutionary movement operating in a revolutionary situation, and a bourgeois government under challenge from that movement. But it is suggestive of a more basic principle in relation to the two terrains of struggle mentioned above, in which the latter is always and ultimately the decisive terrain. This Leninist position still holds. (Such also was the perspective of Gramsci, though he has not been spared a reformist reading to locate the decisive terrain of struggle within existing institutions)....

And here, while struggle within existing institutions remains a very important complement to the overall struggle, historical experience is, in its own way, quite instructive and needs to be taken note of. The presence of Soviets as effective organs of *dual power*, a power outside of existing institutions, was an important factor in the success of the October Revolution. Similar organs of potential or actual dual power emerged later in several other revolutionary processes too—in the Finnish Revolution and Bela Kun's Hungary in 1918, in 1919-23 Germany, in Italy in 1920, in Spain in 1936, in Chile in 1972-73, in Portugal in 1974-75 and so on. Their lack of effective power was a contributory factor in the ultimate dismal outcomes. Details apart, what historical experience the world over points to is the paramount need to build up people's organised strength, a social power, on the

terrain outside the established institutions of bourgeois democracy as necessary sanctions for the success of the revolutionary process. This will also be an important factor in determining how peaceful or 'non-violent' this revolutionary process is going to be....

As we have noted earlier, Marx himself had warned that even in countries with the possibility of a relatively peaceful socialist revolution, the ruling classes will not give in without staging 'a slave-holders' revolt'. Engels had written:

the time for surprise attacks, of revolutions carried out by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses in past. When it is a question of complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for with body and soul.

He had urged the socialists to 'first win the great mass of the people'. Even so, he did not rule out a violent capitalist reaction to any peaceful bid for power—'a blood-letting like that of 1871 in Paris'. The obvious implication is that extra-parliamentary struggles, the essential basis of any serious preparation to meet such a contingency, cannot and must not be subordinated to parliamentary politics. Mass extra-parliamentary socio-political movements and struggles indeed remain the central axis, the decisive terrain of the struggle for a socialist revolution. In fact capitalism is itself, by definition, and very effectively in its mode of acting and functioning, an extra-parliamentary force, and the capitalist state holds within itself any number of forces not amenable to the conventional democratic or parliamentary control. 'The "dominant class" is not a figure of speech', Miliband has pointed out, 'it denotes a very real and formidable concentration of power, a close partnership of capital and the capitalist state, a combined force of class power and state power, armed with vast resources, and determined to use them to the full, in conjunction with its allies abroad, to prevent an effective challenge to its power.' There will be no advance whatsoever until the working people's movement is activated in the form of becoming capable of *offensive* action—as against the usual defensive action through conventional trade unionism, party

politics in parliament or outside, etc.—against capital and the dominant classes through its own appropriate institutions and through its extra-parliamentary force, its organised and conscious social power in society.

Here indeed also lies the answer to the question of how violent or peaceful, armed insurrectionary or otherwise, the revolutionary process will be. Violence is not the essence of the matter and there is nothing un-Marxist or irrational in seeking to carry through a revolutionary process without violence or force of arms. But its possibility depends, above all, upon whether the ruling classes will allow it to be non-violent or peaceful. Historical experience, October Revolution included, bears witness that they will not. (Chile is a classic example in more recent times.) Even so, the greater the strength of the extra-parliamentary force or social power the revolutionaries have, the more evident their ability and willingness to meet counter-revolutionary violence with overwhelming revolutionary violence, the greater the chance that violence can be avoided and the revolutionary process be relatively peaceful.

The amount of violence that will be involved in a given revolutionary process is indeed impossible to predict in advance. It depends on the one hand on the nature and amount of ruling class resistance but in a large part, also, on how successfully the socialists have built people's social power from below and how hegemonic or influential they are in society as a whole. As Wilhelm Reich has argued,

the larger the mass base of the revolutionary movement, the less violence will be required and the more, also, will the masses lose their fear of revolution. The increasing degree of influence of the revolutionary movement inside the army and the state apparatus has the same effect. For this reason the Russian revolution had only a minimum of casualties.

(Bourgeois propaganda's violence in the Russian revolution did not accompany but *followed* the revolution, thanks to the foreign-backed armed counter-revolution by the former ruling classes.)

For Socialists or Communists, revolution is a matter, not of violence or non-violence, but of fundamental structural change in society. As revolutionaries they do not *advocate* violence. For

them it is a tragic necessity to defend the revolution with violence when the ruling classes violate the victories and rights of the people. People have a natural aversion to violence and revolutionaries respect it—a respect, as Trotsky has underlined in his account of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks remarkably demonstrated in 1917....

Chapter 12

Of Globalisation*

I

In his dominant way of thinking, Marx analysed the capitalist mode of production as it came up in Western Europe, and even as he visualised a rapid worldwide universalising mission for it, he focused on the fundamental class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the advanced capitalist countries. Recognising the proletariat as the worst victims of the irrationality and exploitation of capitalism, as they indeed then were, and optimistic about their 'winning the theoretic awareness of their loss', Marx postulated 'workers' revolutions', which would open up, on the basis of advanced productive forces, a successful transition to socialism/communism, the higher form of society he visualised as a transcending successor to the capitalist social order. But the further development of capitalism (which, incidentally also witnessed the rise of reformism in the socialist movement) falsified these assumptions and history took a different course. This however was not entirely unanticipated by Marx.

At the very outset, in the *Communist Manifesto*, this is how Marx characterised the ever-expanding capitalist world market:

the need for a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle

everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. The bourgeoisie by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production...

But even as Marx underlined this globalising nature of capitalism, he saw it making 'nations of peasants (dependent) on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West'; and the *Manifesto* unambiguously suggested that the capitalist world market cannot rescue these backward (peasant) nations from their misery. Later he wrote of the devastation, the misery and suffering British rule caused in India, and noticed, in *Capital*, the emergence of a new, an international division of labour suited to the requirements of the chief centres of modern industry, which 'converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part', etc. The point to notice here is that as part of this other understanding of capitalist development, its uneven, unequal or combined character, which he never lived long enough to develop, he had all along postulated another theory of revolution, this time in the underdeveloped parts of the capitalist world.

This we have discussed earlier in some detail. The important fact is that, as a result of the unequal development in capitalist expansion, for causes that are neither local nor conjunctural but systemic and structural to capitalism as a world system, socialist revolutions or revolutionary movements of our time have appeared most often not at the centre but at the periphery of world capitalism—in Russia, China, Cuba, Indo-China, or in the name of socialism, in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. For this is indeed where the worst victims of global capitalism's irrationality and exploitation are to be found, and therefore from where the challenge to capitalism emanated. The collapse of the Soviet Union does not end or modify the structural logic of global capitalism as manifested in poverty, underdevelopment,

* Excerpts from the author's *Crisis of Socialism—Notes in Defence of a Commitment*.

deindustrialisation and exploitation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It has only made global capitalism all the more powerful and given a new edge to its predatory logic. Any social system built on inequality in the command of human and natural resources works in many ways to reproduce itself and to increase the extent of the in-built inequality. So does capitalism. But as a market-governed system, capitalism carries this process to the extremes. The law of accumulation of capital inexorably produces, reproduces, and enhances inequality—wealth at one end and poverty at the other, not only within countries but on a world scale. And this is precisely what *globalisation*—another of the currently fashionable, reality-obscuring buzzwords—does. It has only sharpened the global capitalism's contradiction between its developed centre and exploited periphery. But this, if the past is any guide, also makes this periphery, the third world of the worst victims of contemporary capitalism, the site of revolts, of new countrywise challenges to the global capitalist order.



'Globalisation' so called is a subject I shall be specifically returning to later in these notes. In the immediate context it needs to be recognised that it is no sudden new condition or phenomenon it is often made out to be. On the contrary, it is a process that has been going on for a long time, in fact ever since capitalism came into the world as a viable form of society four or five centuries ago. Capitalism was indeed born in the process of creating a world market through its centuries long spread by conquest and exploitation of Asia, Africa and Latin America and economic penetration and plunder everywhere. Thus born, capitalism in its innermost essence is an expanding system both internally and externally, its different units constantly compete among themselves for control of the weaker including remaining non-capitalist areas. The classic analysis of emergence, evolution and expansion of capitalism is of course Marx's *Capital*. And he showed that the logic of the always expansive and often explosive capital accumulation necessarily generates inequality in society, wealth and affluence at one end, poverty and deprivation at the other. In other words, capitalism

cannot and does not make for universal success and prosperity. It can only universalise its contradictions, its polarisation between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. In fact, insofar as it is successful, its successes are also its failures. The more successful it is on its own terms, that is, the more it maximises profit and so-called growth, the more it devours its own human and natural resources. In doing so, one may add, capitalism also makes for new opportunities for that unfashionable thing called class struggle.

The general law of capitalist accumulation, as Marx called it, which governs the dynamic of capitalism, and generates increasing wealth and affluence at one pole of society and growing poverty and degradation at the opposite pole, does so not only within nations but, as a global or world system, among nations as well, leading necessarily to the polarisation of the world into centre and periphery nations, nations rich and poor. This double process of polarisation is immanent in capitalism, its permanent and basic feature, a product of the structural logic of actually existing capitalism. This predatory logic has been, now and then, somewhat curbed, but never irreversibly, within the countries of advanced capitalism—a curbing made possible by the successful struggles of the working classes and an expanding capitalism which could accommodate the success of these struggles, and facilitated by the threat of socialism, through Soviet existence or otherwise, which exercised its own *civilising* influence on metropolitan capitalism. But the accumulation process has operated all the more effectively and ruthlessly on the world scale, all the time shaping and reshaping the peripheral economies in line with the needs of capitalism at the centre and thus all the time widening the overall gap between the countries of the centre and those of the periphery or semi-periphery in the third world. By its very nature, global capitalism tends to perpetuate and deepen this structural inequality and disparity, regardless of the intentions of individual capitalists or state managers. This is a characteristic of capitalism in all its stages of development that was explicitly noticed by Marx and further theorised by Lenin and later Marxists. Throughout it has been in the interest of the first world

of advanced capitalist countries to have colonies or semi-colonial areas as preserves to make profit in whatever way it could be made. Contemporary 'globalisation' is no exception. In relation to the third world, it is imperialism all over again, albeit in a new shape or form, when, the logic of capitalism now become more or less universal, imperialism achieves its ends not so much by the old forms of military expansion or political control—not that these have become unimportant—but primarily by unleashing and manipulating the exploitative and destructive impulses of the capitalist market. As against the conventional liberal wisdom, it has to be clearly understood that the increasing disparity observed at the periphery of the system, the all too visible underdevelopment and its consequences, is not a vestige of a pre-capitalist past (the fashionable neo-Weberian thesis), but the inevitable product of their capitalist present, not a condition of inadequate capitalist development (the developmentalist thesis) but in reality an inevitable outcome of the accumulation process of the global capitalist system to which countries of the periphery, that is the third world, belong as much as those of the first world.

The post-Second World War period, a period of rapid and generally sustained capitalist expansion also saw new worldwide awareness of the deep-rooted disparities between the rich countries and those of the third world, an awareness which in the West was certainly compelled by the attraction the alternative Soviet model of development exerted in the post-colonial third world. But despite all the noise made about bridging the gap between the North and the South, the promises based on the supposedly scientific discoveries of a new discipline called 'development economics', UN resolutions and foreign aid programmes, all the talk about the New International Economic Order etc., the gap between the rich and poor countries kept widening. As Harry Magdoff has put it: 'Despite the striking transformations in the world capitalist system since the end of the Second World War, two major distinguishing features of the third world did not change: in general, and in a fundamental sense, the chains of dependency binding the periphery to the centre remain, (and) the gap between the

periphery and the centre, as throughout the history of capitalism, keeps on widening'. It is important to recognise in this connection that this North-South gap and the conflict resulting from it, which is one of the basic contradictions of actually existing capitalism, has never been the product of East-West, that is, US-USSR conflict or its projection outside Europe, though a reciprocal interaction was always there and the support of USSR for certain third world nationalist forces helped sustain this impression. The North-South conflict is anterior and primordial, it has defined, for five centuries, capitalism as a polarising world system, bringing only misery and suffering to the peoples of the third world, and for this very reason intolerable to the vast majority of people on this planet, earth.

'Globalisation', today's watchword was thus a reality yesterday too—a capitalist world economy characterised by centre-periphery relations of domination and exploitation—though this reality was somewhat distorted and obscured by the post-war retreat of the all too visible colonial empires. But, part of an ongoing process with a five centuries-old history, the current splurge of globalisation, as with all such phenomena, has its historical specificity which in its own way reinforces the subordination of the periphery to the more self-driven productive accumulation pattern of the centre: it is simultaneously propelled by a new accumulation crisis of capitalism and a renewed ascendancy of rightwing politics the world over.

The economic context of today's globalisation has been the current recession of capitalism beginning in the 1970s, marked by the interrelated processes of retarded growth, ever increasing monopolisation and transnationalisation of the economy and the financialisation of the accumulation process, with all their contradictions. There is a swelling flow of profits but a reduced demand for additional investment in increasingly controlled markets and thus a shift away from capitalism's productive moorings accompanied inevitably by exceedingly high levels of unemployment in the advanced capitalist world as a whole.

There is the growing tendency for profits, unable to find profitable outlets in real capital formation, to be diverted into purely financial, and mostly speculative channels. An increasingly intense double process of faltering real investment and burgeoning financialisation has been on, the ongoing technological, especially information revolution facilitating literally worldwide fluidity of highly volatile finance capital ('hot money' economists call it), with all its contagious uncertainties and exploitative-cum-explosive consequences. Central to the current economic recession has been a slowing down of capital accumulation and with it of economic growth which under capitalism is powered by capital accumulation. This crisis within capitalism as a profit-driven system, a crisis made all the more intractable by growing class conflict, has underlined the insufficiencies of the limited globalisation of the earlier period associated with the welfare state. Therefore even as the welfare state is dismantled (and with it disappear the remaining illusions of Keynesianism), a new overseas expansion, an absolute breaching of the national barriers, becomes more urgent than ever before. It is this compulsion, and not the much too abstractly treated 'technological changes' or 'world market imperatives', which underlies the current thrust of global capitalism, its need, even as it 'restructures' economy at home for intensified exploitation of working classes, to prise open the third world economies for penetration not only of metropolitan goods and capital, but even more important of metropolitan finance with all its speculative proclivities. From the other end, economic instability or breakdowns in the countries of the third world, often facing a crisis if not a failure of their projects of national development, together with the collapse of economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, have made for both a need and an opportunity for global capitalism to intervene in order to protect and secure its worldwide old and new imperial interests.

The political context of this new globalising thrust of capitalism was provided, along with a general failure of social-democratic left in the advanced capitalist countries, by a worldwide retreat of radicalism, and more particularly defeats

of revolutionary left in Latin America, Africa and Asia during this period, notably the destruction of the guerrilla campaigns in Latin America followed by the rise of military dictatorships, exhaustion of socialist hopes in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Angola in repression and civil wars and, buttressing the earlier destruction of Indonesian communism, the consolidation of the capitalist turn in China in the late 1970s and 1980s. This collapse or destruction of the left in the third world which was, as is now well-documented, actively engineered, supported or abetted by the capitalist powers led by the United States, simply 'disorganised' any real opposition to global capitalism. To cap it all came the collapse in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union leading to a capitalist triumphalism where 'the market' comes to be so celebrated as to question and run down all forms of real or perceived intervention against it, not only traditional socialism but even Keynesianism, any kind of welfarism by conventional social democracy, third world nationalism, the statist dirigisme developmental model, everything. The new agenda must reflect the all-encompassing sovereignty of 'the market': rapid and comprehensive liberalisation of trade, capital flows and foreign direct investment, the cutting down of state budgets and subsidies or social welfare, privatisation of public sectors and security for now more than ever sacred private property rights of both local and foreign investors, and, of course, a starkly diminished role of the state so far as economy is concerned. Given its historically specific economic and political context, the ongoing globalisation has, in recent years, literally acquired the form of a worldwide offensive of global capitalism, carried out with its economic instrumentalities of foreign investment, money-lending and international trade, organised institutional structures like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and buttressed by the neo-liberal ideology with its reductionist remedy for all ills—the market.

Globalisation, in its current neo-liberal version, has presented itself as a benign process that brings multiple benefits to those who participate in it, all inhabitants of capitalist countries, at

the centre as well as the periphery. Academic experts, public officials and the mass media alike have gone to town interpreting it as something fundamentally different from what we have known, indeed as a new era in human affairs where national economies, functioning as units of a world market, undergo, and share in the advantages of, a mutually beneficent integration and recomposition. But this is only so much bourgeois ideology purveying the conventional wisdom of capitalism. The process of globalisation has indeed produced much that is new in the world's economy and politics but it has *not* changed the basic ways capitalism operates. And unequal access to natural resources, control over international financial institutions, scientific and technological monopolies, extra-economic mechanisms of political and military coercion, together with the cultural domination of lifestyles that the powerful reach of modern media ensures, have only served to intensify exploitation and increase in every dimension the polarisation between the rich and poor countries produced by the structural logic of capitalism. That some third world countries have managed to make at times—often only for a time—notable progress with their industrialisation and trade, or that third world elites have conspicuously benefited from globalisation, does not alter this basic fact, the overall gap between core and periphery nations has kept widening. Within the globalised capitalist world, the poor, polarised third world as a whole remains what it has been throughout the history of capitalism, the locus for capital accumulation and profit-making by giant corporations and financial institutions of the advanced capitalist nations. And it must so remain. With four-fifth of the world's population as a vital reserve army of labour and indispensable natural resources, the periphery must be preserved—it is not marginal as many economists believe, the two Gulf Wars are a good recent illustration—and subordinated to the expansion of capital however polarising this may be—to the extent that even as this permits a certain peripheral industrialisation in one part, it makes for the 'fourth-worldisation' of another, as, for example, in parts of Africa, creating nations like Haiti which were formerly integrated into

the capitalist system but have been since marginalised, even abandoned, by the resulting exhaustion of their natural resources. This 'fourth world' is sometimes spoken of as something new but we know of areas destroyed by capitalism in its earlier forms. Such destruction in fact has been a constant feature of capitalist expansion.

The current globalisation has been pre-eminently propelled by global capital's macro-economic 'structural adjustment programme' (SAP), a powerful instrument of economic restructuring which bears a direct relationship to the above-mentioned process of global impoverishment; it further deepens the centre-periphery polarisation. The development of the periphery has in fact been the history of a never-ending 'adjustment' to the demands and constraints of the dominant global capitalism. The centres 'restructure' themselves and the peripheries are 'adjusted' to these restructurings. And International Monetary Fund and World Bank have been the two most important institutions involved in sponsoring the current programmes of 'economic stabilisation' and 'structural adjustment' in the third world. This is what Harry Magdoff has to say on the significance of these transnational institutions' rise to world dominance in recent years:

I don't think that there has been a significant change in the role of the IMF and the World Bank. From their inception at the time the Second World War was winding down to this day, their main function has not varied. Their job has been, and continues to be, the strengthening and enlargement of the imperialist network of trade and investment. There have been three key components to this strategy. The first was to reconstruct and stabilize the international financial system which had been wrecked by the Great Depression and the war. The second was to tie the colonial, and subsequently decolonized, nations firmly to the economies of the great powers, and thereby widen investment opportunities and enlarge markets in the periphery. The third was to sabotage the efforts of those nations that wanted to break out of the imperialist network by shifting to policies of self-reliance and/or developing close relations with non-capitalist countries.

The increasing level of activity of these agencies in recent years reflects not a new role but the spread of a general crisis in the last quarter century. As the so-called golden years of the 1950s and 1960s turned into a long-run stagnation, these agencies intervened more often because breakdowns in the periphery threatened the stability of financial institutions and markets of the leading capitalist powers. In addition, these agencies have become more brazen and open in imposing conditions for granting loans. Before 1972 these conditions were by and large kept secret as long as possible. They became overt when the axe fell on the masses, who were expected to pay directly and indirectly the debt service charges to international banks. The more recent openness in disclosing the conditions imposed by the IMF and the World Bank no doubt reflects the increasing hegemony of bourgeois ideology, according to which the removal of subsidies that give some protection to the poor, so-called free markets and free international trade, privatization, and unrestricted foreign investment are supposed to be principal ways to obtain economic recovery and growth.

Increasing intervention by the IMF and the World Bank? Yes, but it is intervention for the sake of capital and its financial markets. Why put the finger on the servants instead of the masters? There has been no significant change in the thrust by the imperial powers to control and influence the periphery. What is new is the inability of capital to creep out of the morass of a long-lasting stagnation, accompanied by increasing fragility of financial institutions. In such times, the squeeze on the weaker nations is bound to get tougher.

The Fund-Bank-sponsored SAP has been, with a few variations to account for the inescapable local conditions, offering almost identical answers to problems in diverse places—be it Russia and other countries of ex-Soviet Union, the transition economies of East Europe, the Sub-Saharan Africa and the poor countries of Latin America, East and South-East Asia, including India, and so on. The formulas being advanced are the same everywhere: a rolling back of the state from the economic arena so that private enterprise and free markets can get on with the job of 'growth' (really profit making) unencumbered by any controls or regulations, disinvestment or wholesale privatisation of public sector enterprises, free and friendly entry for foreign capital,

liberalisation of international trade with elimination of tariff and other barriers, drastic cutting of government expenditure on social services and subsidies for mass consumption and, above all, dependence on loans from international financial institutions and reliance on export-led growth even at the cost of domestic needs, etc.—the essence of it all being a development governed by external imperatives, those flowing from the world capitalist market. The outcome, naturally, has been more or less the same everywhere: stagflation and recession, crisis and virtual collapse of domestic economy and of course an ultimate fall into the debt trap. All this is accompanied by rising unemployment, a drastic fall in basic consumption, deterioration of education, health and social welfare, aggravating the sufferings of the poor millions in the periphery of global capitalism who indeed bear the brunt of the Fund-Bank-sponsored 'structural adjustment', all the more so when it comes imposed in its draconian form known as 'shock therapy'.

This should be no cause for surprise. After all, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank are not in the business of philanthropy, or in the development and growth business either as they claim or are claimed to be. They are in the business of lending and making money on it for, or otherwise securing the interests of, their global masters. Surely it is not their business to help develop new rivals to them in the ever-shrinking world market. As instruments of global capitalism, they are committed, through 'conditionalities' they impose, to promote the interests of major capitalist powers who, especially the United States, have clout in them and exercise it to enforce neoclassical policies of stabilisation and structural adjustment in the borrowing countries. The IMF is now widely, and very rightly, perceived as a 'gendarme of international rentier interests', and together the Fund-Bank duo has been well described as 'watchdogs of global capitalism'. It is not at all surprising that Fund-Bank-sponsored structural adjustment has been a systemic mechanism which cannot but distort economies, reproduce unequal development and perpetuate capitalism's ancient polarisations within and across countries on a global scale.

That this is indeed the case is now widely recognised. The United Nations Human Development Report (1996), for example, identified five types of distortions or 'imbalances' that can come to afflict the process of economic growth anywhere: jobless growth (growth without new employment), ruthless growth (inequalising growth with rich becoming richer and poor not any better off), voiceless growth (rapid growth under an authoritarian regime, where economic prosperity is not accompanied by political freedom), rootless growth (where material prosperity is achieved at the cost of cultural, social and ethnic identity), and, finally, futureless growth (growth which is environment-unfriendly, where the present generation squanders resources needed by future generations)—these distortions or imbalances are today a more or less conspicuous feature of the economic development in Fund-Bank loan or aid recipient countries of the third world, accompanied by the reality of a world further divided into two unequal worlds, each unequal within itself with growing inequalities of its own. Systemic inequality engendered by a turn to free market apart, even as the rolling back of the state from economic sphere (deregulation, privatisation, etc.) has directly benefited the dominant classes within and the foreign investors, its retreat from the social sphere (cutting of state welfare expenditure and consumption subsidies, etc.) has only added to the misery and suffering of the common people living in the periphery and semi-periphery of global capitalism. Speaking of the 'fiscal stabilisation' and 'structural adjustment' programmes of the IMF and World Bank, the Human Development Report has wryly quipped: 'they often balanced budgets by unbalancing people's lives'.

Capital is now globally mobile, more so than ever before, the amount of Foreign Direct Investment involved varying from country to country, depending as it does on the local economic and still more political climate, and producing for the investors maximum and needfully resilient profits. With rising labour costs and the shift to higher value-added products at home, multinational corporations have moved an increasing part of

their production elsewhere. Products now produced in countries abroad by their foreign affiliates are then sold there as well as exported across the globe including to the home countries of the multinationals. The important point is that, even when entering into partnership with local capital, rarely do these multinational corporations relinquish control over either advanced technology or their production-sales chains, thus ensuring a steady stream of profits for stockholders back home. But far more important than such foreign investment is the fact that what has become generally mobile across countries is not so much productive capital as short-term finance in the form of foreign currency deposits, portfolio investment, etc., which are essentially indistinguishable from 'hot money' (a most important aspect of today's 'actually existing capitalism') which moves around from country to country in search of quick profits, especially in the form of speculative gains. In other words, what has really happened in world capitalism is not so much a tendency towards globalisation of production as a tendency towards globalisation of finance. And this form of capital does not generate economic growth in the recipient country. The foreign creditors are not interested in undertaking any productive venture, speculation in the market is their preferred interest; though the 'hot money' inflow can be and has been as well used for stimulating imports of consumption goods for the local elite. Needless to add, the inevitably sudden outflow of such capital plunges the recipient country into a new financial crisis. The imperative to generate the requisite surplus for financing the outflow compels a drastic squeeze on the living standards of the poor, sharp cutbacks in whatever productive investment was occurring and the transfer of national assets to foreign creditors 'for a song', as has indeed happened in recent years in Mexico and elsewhere. Lenin had pointed out that finance capital is associated with swindling, bribery and corruption—what European 'professors' of his time condescendingly called 'the American ethics'. The third world is today witness to a wholesale resurgence of this 'ethics of the market', the emergence of an entire new breed of buccaneers in business or sharks on the stock exchanges, international

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The evidence of this collapse is there in the disintegration of values and degradation of life all around us, in the continuing poverty of our people and growing consumerism of the elites and a society at once cynical and fearful about the future. It is there in official statistics and pages of the private media and so-called 'national mainstream' which bearing the impress of India's corrupt and corrupting, somewhat lumpen capitalist development, is an increasingly dirty affair—corrupt, communal and criminalised, a repressively homogenising mainstream. Clinching it all perhaps is the evidence provided by the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of Indian independence: the Colgate-sponsored televised selling of *Vande Matarams* by hordes of VIP and VVIP Indians and the supposedly 'stirring' calls made on the occasion—in Parliament for a 'second freedom struggle' and by the Prime Minister to 'begin the struggle for economic freedom', which left one wondering what the past fifty years had been about. A Finance Minister had taken India back into globalisation, asking us not to be afraid of the East India Company, opened up India to the multinationals on the dishonest plea that 'the nation has been living beyond its means'—'nation' indeed, when a good majority of our people have simply no means to live and most others none to indulge in any 'living beyond'! His successor, more honest and ideologically committed, was now publicly pleading with the globalisers in London, the successors of East India Company, to come back to India for another equally long stay: 'You came to India and stayed for 200 years. Now come prepared to invest and stay for another 200 years, and there will be huge rewards.' The post-

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